

DOWNERS: CRIP AFFECT AND RADICAL RELATIONALITIES

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ABSTRACT

Taking up prior formulations of crip affect, I explore the positionality of the “downer” as one whose body complicates global economies of social and political encounter. Engaging with neoliberal formulations of embodiment and the co-constitutive forces of heteronormativity and compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer, 2006), I look at the ways in which many theoretical and political disability justice projects position disability as complementary to consumer capitalism, producing normative frameworks into which certain “abnormal” embodiments can be incorporated. I propose that the downer, as a relational body that proliferates social dis-ease and economic dysfunction, mobilizes crip affect ironically and creatively. Through processes of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Kim 2015; Puar 2015), downers resist assimilation into biomedical frameworks, and in doing so, propose generative forms of social, economic, political, and corporeal unintelligibility. This article is, itself, an exercise in becoming downer. It renders habitable an ostensibly uninhabitable positionality.

Keywords: Crip theory, disability, affect, care, necropolitics, non-human

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Introduction: Becoming-downer

“How are you?” What a seemingly innocent question: at best, well-intentioned interest, and at worst, a polite habit. And what of its corollary?: “I’m good,” or maybe just “fine,” but never is the acceptable answer: “actually, I spent all morning on the toilet shitting out my insides, and now I feel like my whole body has given up on life, so terrible,” or, “I’m so depressed I barely managed to drag myself out of bed this morning and all I want in the whole wide world is to crawl back into it.” Productive participation in the social world is contingent upon a person’s ability to successfully negotiate these scripted conversations. No matter how common sense they may be, though, these call and response mechanisms have never come easily to me. “Fine” only emerges from a mouth drawn into a tight smile, usually following a series of transparent facial expressions. Confusion, thoughtfulness, uncertainty, frustration, defeat manipulate my features, overlapping and shifting, moving images on a screen.

In these moments, I become downer. What does it mean to become downer? It is a process of engagement, a commitment to social dis-ease, and an attentiveness to affect and its unpredictability. It is a lonely relationality. It is lonely in that, more often than not, it involves being ostracized, set aside, and seen as an exception without being exceptional. It is relational because engagement is always relational, even while it presents as refusal and negation. Becoming-downer highlights the ways in which assemblages of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, debility produce the appearance of subjectivities that are virtually uninhabitable. Becoming downer is always self deprecating, and therein lies its strength and its ability to move beyond and through bounded subjectivities, tearing them to shreds and reassembling them in unexpected ways.

This thesis comes from a needing body, where needing highlights how crip bodies assert their liveliness in ways that defy normative operations of power. It speaks to bodies that burst through the seams of social intelligibility, not necessarily because they want or desire to, but because they can't not. These bodies propose forms of relationality that problematize the operations of sociality. They are always accumulating, emitting, absorbing and diffusing. As I attempt to settle into a body mired in indeterminacy, as I read and write and think and organize from a critical perspective, struggling to understand the nuances of ability and debility playing out in and around a (my?) queer, cis-female, white, middle class, fat body, I start challenging theoretical and activist conventions I've held so dear. I delve into that which goes without saying. What must go strategically unsaid in order to gain access to social legitimation and much-needed services are the messy, uncomfortable, painful, traumatic, icky places that have no place in "the good life" neoliberal subjects are expected to always strive for, even though (and largely because) it can never be realized. Ahmed (2010b) explores the various implications of what a good life entails, taking the notion of happiness—that presumed good that often goes without saying—as the starting point for an analysis of the regulatory aspects of positive emotions. The discursive and emotional force of happiness stems from: 1) its taken for granted status as "good"; 2) its association with various forms of social, economic, cultural, and corporeal privilege; and 3) its promissory function. Happiness, as it is popularly conceived, is impossible for everyone, though some are positioned as more proximate than others. Happiness, by virtue of being always on the horizon, but never quite here, produces a social context in which its pursuit determines so many of our social goals, ideals, and actions (Ahmed, 2010b). The regulatory functions of happiness are, for Ahmed (2010a; 2010b), largely a question of orientation. Ahmed (2010a) writes, "orientations are about the direction we take that puts some

things and not others within reach” (p. 245). We are also oriented towards (and away from) different objects and emotions, and these orientations circumscribe the ways in which people are socially, spatially, and temporally located. So if happiness is good, and unhappiness is bad, what does it mean to be oriented to one and not the other?

This question is directly related to what is meant by “happy,” and what is decidedly not meant. Health and ability are two examples of what Ahmed (2010a) terms “happy objects.” They are shifting, unstable figures, coalescing only to disperse and come together somewhere else; people, by virtue of relative proximity, are oriented toward or away from them. Happiness, longevity, productivity, and progress are sites from which disabled people, along with other social and corporeal deviants, are largely excluded, whether that be through the development and employment of various reproductive technologies aimed to weed out disabled and otherwise deficient bodies; through differential emphases on medical research and access to treatment relative to the social acceptability/legibility and potential future productivity of disabled bodies; and/or the large-scale writing off of disabled lives as cursed or doomed, always oriented towards death and debility. These various technologies function as forms of management, dictating the terms of disabled embodiment and existence. Relative degrees of health and illness according to western biomedical models and the history of allopathic medicine influence how bodies are spatially, socially, and economically positioned.

Disabled bodies expose the ways in which the pursuit of happiness is inaccessible (and sometimes undesirable) to many. If unhappiness is to be aggressively avoided, and disabled bodies are fundamentally tied to unhappiness, it is not surprising that disabled bodies are approached in ways that either create and circulate technologies aimed at recuperation into the orbit of happiness, neutralize that unhappiness by positioning disabled bodies outside the

otherwise happy social body (out of sight, out of mind), or exterminate that unhappiness through curative medicine wherever possible. Happiness remains, throughout, a largely uncontested good. In such a context, the tendency within much disability theory and rights movements is to reorient disabled bodies toward normative visions of happiness and unhappiness, and understandably so. The gains achieved through many disability rights movements that have taken this approach are undeniable. However, much is lost in this process. Meaningful and important changes in the lived experiences of many disabled bodies are reliant on an aggressive reorientation to happiness, but the restrictions around which bodies can access those orientations and which cannot produce damaging exclusions: damaging both to those bodies excluded and to the movements that have left them in the dust. Johnson powerfully voices the loss that comes from a disabled appeal to happiness:

To reflect on the futility of this idea of future comfort, as it propels us further into discomfort, by working harder to finally get somewhere more comfortable: better posture, a better professional position, or the golden years of rest and leisure, even as we grind joints, contort muscles, and injure discs . . . The decision to be capable—like the decision to be thin (girl, I could tell you stories)—is a winding road of self-deprivation presented as a cultural good. The decision to be unstable, incapable, unwilling, disabled (*the sharpness of this ‘cannot’*) opens up a world of possibility. (Johnson and McRuer, 2014, p. 137)

The sharpness Johnson references involves another, incredibly fraught, orientation. It is an orientation towards pain, suffering, and death. It is an orientation that promises nothing except what is already there, in the flesh. Such an orientation speaks to Ahmed’s (2010a; 2010b) work while simultaneously complicating it. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed (2010b) explores the

figures of the “feminist killjoy,” the “unhappy queer,” “the angry black woman,” and the “melancholic migrant.” It would seem appropriate to add “the disabled downer” that this thesis concerns itself with to this list, positioning it as an extension of Ahmed’s (2010b) exceptional book. However, the downer functions differently, here. Though the downer is, in keeping with Ahmed’s (2010b) text, a figure of emotive deviance, it is also a corporeal interruption. A large part of the downer’s heuristic appeal is its orientation away from normative emotive frameworks, but this orientation also looks toward the ways in which becoming downer has the potential to propose a space that exceeds emotive normality (or emotive deviance, for that matter) and points to a politicized affective position based in the sensations that accompany being a body in the world.

Becoming downer points to the unpredictability and multiplicity of sensation. It also highlights its varied relevance. Becoming downer does not mean the same thing to all bodies. Rather, it identifies the temporal, spatial, economic, and social distances between subjectivities so as to traverse them without universalizing them. Becoming downer mobilizes difference. Difference, here, is unsettling and unsettled. It is a relational doing, rather than a self-evident relation, similar to how Muñoz (2006) understands racial performativity. Muñoz (2006) writes:

This turn to the performativity of race is prone to the corrosive forces of corporate multiculturalism and other manifestations of globalization. It seems especially important to consider racial formations through a lens that is not hamstrung by positivism, insofar as the discourse of positivism is at best reductive and unresponsive to the particularities of racial formations. The epistemological core of what race is has become less and less accessible during these tumultuous times. It is therefore expedient to consider what race does. Furthermore, to look at race as a performative enterprise, one that can best be

accessed by its effects, may lead us out of political and conceptual impasses that have dogged racial discourse. (Muñoz, 2006, p. 679)

This thesis understands crip downer-ness as similarly performative. For McRuer (2004), disability productively enters theory and politics when read as an “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of bodily, mental, or behavioral functioning aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically” (p. 58). This reading responds to the flexibility and mutability of disability or crip-ness. However, rather than approach the open boundaries of disability as lending themselves towards a universalizing discourse, as many have done, McRuer (2004) holds the assertion that “in some very important ways, we are in fact *not* all queer/disabled” (p. 58). In fact, such assertions are detrimental to a radical crip theory and politic, manifesting as “able-bodied/heterosexual *containments*,” an indirect way of saying, ‘you don’t need to be taken seriously, do you?’” (McRuer, 2004, p. 58). These point to the importance of reading for moments, specifically, “disabled/queer moments” (McRuer, 2004, p. 59). In these ways, a performative reading of crip embodiment contends with difference without enlisting static identifications. Crip downer-ness must be read as a series of doings and moments; a mobile affective positionality that nonetheless retains a degree of distance from compulsory able-bodiedness and heteronormativity.

Additionally, crip performativity and racial performativity are not parallel strands of thought so much as they are inextricably tied up in one another. Muñoz (2006) describes what he terms, “feeling brown” in ways that fruitfully overlap with formulations of crip, downer affect. For Muñoz (2006), feeling brown “is descriptive of the ways in which minoritarian affect is always, no matter what its register, partially illegible in relation to the normative affect

performed by normative citizen subjects” (p. 679). Downer-ness is a related form of minoritarian affect, here. Its illegibility is directly related to its incommensurability with normative affective infrastructures. Furthermore, downer-ness, while it is, itself, an affective positionality, varies according to its interactions with other non-normative affects. Muñoz (2006), rejecting biomedical formulations of depression, takes up the term to explore forms of “feeling down” that relate to “feeling brown,” acknowledging that depression is not necessarily brown nor is brownness a fundamentally depressive position. For Muñoz (2006), “the depressive position is not a linear or task-oriented sense of developmental closure. It is instead a position that we live in, and it describes the ways in which we attempt to enter psychic reality” (p. 681). Downer-ness is this kind of position, one in which bodies circulate without a roadmap or trajectory. However, it is not the same as the Muñoz ‘s (2006) depressive position, wherein “we resist a disrepair within the social that would lead to a breakdown in one’s ability to see and know the other” (p. 682). Rather, downer-ness embraces disrepair, social debility, and the impossibility of seeing or knowing, and proposes forms of relationality that are not so much antisocial as they are extrasocial. It proposes bonds and encounters that move beyond the strictly human. These bonds are socially illegible and stubbornly so.

Crip economies

Where pain, discomfort, and dis-ease resist available medical and cultural technologies of effective management or cure, the positioning of disabled people and bodies as downers emerges as a technique of control, attempting to neutralize where incorporation has failed. For downers, figures that seem to exist solely to compromise the comfort and happiness of those around them, material experiences of physical, mental, and/or affective pain, discomfort, and dis-ease that

often accompany experiences of disability are demeaned and dismissed. The significance of these sensations and emotions is shifted from the body from which they emerge to the social body they confront and challenge.

The particular contexts and investments that serve to position these forms of self-editing and strategic omission as imperative relate directly to social, political, and economic power structures. Neoliberalism, the predominant social, cultural, economic, and somatic technology at work within western capitalist states and those within their reach relies on the privileging of individualism, independence, and productivity. Accordingly, the neoliberal body is, among a host of other qualifiers, an able-body (McRuer, 2006; McRuer and Johnson, 2014; Puar, 2009). This assertion has particular implications for bodies positioned as sites of debility, dependence, impairment, non-productivity, and various other social and somatic failures that stem from an orientation away from neoliberal structures and ideals (Ahmed, 2010a, 2010b; Puar, 2012). Crip bodies are potential threats to the sedimentation and naturalization of able-bodiedness, especially dangerous given the blatant precarity already apparent. They undermine the stability of heterosexism, capitalism, racism, consumerism, all of which rely on notions of ability and disability in terms of relative levels of privilege and marginalization. However, while disabled embodiment may contain something of a threat, that threat has been and continues to be capitalized upon. A radical project aimed at critiquing the able-bodied underpinnings of neoliberalism must remain attuned to the ways in which disability, as such, is not always only a disruption. Rather, as Puar (2012) claims, there is a need to consider “which debilitated bodies can be reinvigorated for neoliberalism, and which cannot” (p. 153).

McRuer and Johnson (2014) cite the development of a global consumer market they term a “crip economy,” dependent upon the circulation of the “debility dollar” (p. 128). This

analysis—intentionally reminds us of forces such as pink washing, homonormativity, and the pink dollar—describes the ways in which an ostensibly marginalized subject position gets taken up within global consumer capitalism to produce new and lucrative markets. Though the debility dollar is still a relatively nascent force, pharmaceutical industries, the increasingly profitable arena of lifestyle drugs, and a host of other technologies aimed to promote “health” have resulted in a thriving industry centred around notions of individual health as always in need of improvement (Puar, 2009). Within this context, the unpredictability and inconvenience of experiences of disability that are not easily incorporated into the positioning of disabled people and bodies as health consumers warrant their own forms of address.

Johnson coined the term “cripistemologies” to name points of divergence from disability studies, which has heretofore been “stalled, at times, by too much consensus, too much harmony, too much propriety” (Johnson and McRuer, 2014, p. 132). Cripistemology enters as a proposal to think “from the critical, social, and personal position of disability” (Johnson and McRuer, 2014, p. 134). Furthermore, it “expands the focus from physical disability to the sometimes-elusive crip subjectivities informed by psychological, emotional, and other invisible and undocumented disabilities” (Johnson and McRuer, 2014, p. 133). Cripistemology resonates with McRuer’s (2006) earlier work on crip theory, a field emerging from the intersections of disability theory and queer theory. It brings an aggressively anti-normative critical project à la queer theory to more focused analyses of ableism and disability found in critical disability studies and vice versa. Where the focus of queer theory found its roots in a radical critique of hetero and homonormativity, crip theory focuses on the workings of compulsory able-bodiedness in relation to queerness (McRuer 2006). Puar (2009) further explores convergences between queer theory and crip theory by referencing “queer disability studies” (p. 164). She writes:

While [queer disability studies] has generally pursued these questions around the subjectivities and political agendas that are and ought to be produced through the intersections of subject formations like “queer” and “disabled” (that is, queer disabled subjects or disabled queer subjects), these intersections push at the definitional boundaries of each term. (Puar, 2009, p. 164)

Citing McRuer (2006), Puar agrees that compulsory able-bodied-ness and compulsory heterosexuality are co-constitutive; that is, disabled bodies are always already queer and queer bodies are always already disabled. As anti-normative projects, queer theory, crip theory, cripistemology, and queer disability studies present valuable points of overlap and are mutually informative.

Downer affect

Crip theory encounters becoming downer where crip bodies are figured as disruptive and deviant. Becoming downer embraces destruction and disarray, reveling in the perverse pleasures that emerge from corporeal chaos. Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), many radical theorists have taken up the concept of “becoming” to attend to the complex ways in which subjectivities circulate, defying bounded analyses (Kim, 2015; Puar, 2015). Becoming, here, asserts the possibility of a mobile, shifting, contextual ontology, for “[w]hat is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through with that which becomes passes” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 238). Becoming is an ongoing process, rather than a self-evident trajectory or state. Becoming defies normative logics of identification or any other attempt at fixity. It involves passing through and among affects, where “affect is not a personal

feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 240).

Puar (2015) puts forward the project of “becoming trans” to attend to the asymmetrical power dynamics that seek to conform gender, sex, disability, and race to the normative mapping of difference in accordance with the technologies of neoliberalism. Becoming trans parallels projects of becoming race (Puar, 2015), becoming object (Kim, 2015), and becoming disabled (Puar, 2015). It speaks to the ways in which race, humanity, gender, and disability are always already processes rather than states, approaching ontologies without setting up shop in them. For Puar (2015), becoming trans is a politic and ethic that unseats identity politics, proposing proliferation and multiplicity in its place. Puar (2015) argues for:

a political and theoretical methodology that intensifies and proliferates race rather than deconstructs it, a proliferation that, rather than hoping to dissolve binaries, makes them fade through the overwhelming force of ontological multiplicity, attuned to the perpetual differentiation of variation to variation and the multiplicity of affirmative becomings. (Puar, 2015, p. 66).

This emphasis on multiplicity paves the way for a radical politic that may address relations of disability and debility as much as it does relations of race, gender, and sexuality.

Becoming downer involves a move from regulatory and finite emotive structures towards a vast field of sensory meanings. It points to the utility of thinking past emotion and venturing into the realm of affect. Massumi (2002) writes, “affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion,” but one of the key points of departure for affect theory is “that emotion and affect . . . follow different logics and pertain to different orders” (p. 27). Affect resides somewhere between bodily sensation and the articulation of those sensations, in the moment when external

stimuli are *felt*, but before they enter into the linguistic and discursive realm of *feelings*. “The issue, after sensation, perception, and memory, is *affect*” (Massumi, 2002, p. 15). Additionally, affect “is marked by a gap between *content* and *effect*” (Massumi, 2002, p. 24); that is, it exists independently of (but in relation to) external stimuli and the emotions from which they extend. In contrast, emotions are better understood as “qualified intensity,” where intensity is synonymous with affect (Massumi, 2002, p. 28). Emotions are “the conventional, consensual, point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized” (Massumi, 2002, p. 28). In its conversion into social narrative and its availability for ownership, emotions such as happiness become tied up in exercises of power. Happiness as emotion effectively yokes the affective responses that might be its undoing.

Within these regimes of meaning, the disabled body asserts its presence in unique ways. Here, we might locate the aggressively anti-normative stance of McRuer (2006, 2014) and Johnson’s (2014) crip. Not only do “illness and disability reveal that the body has a mind of its own,” they also involve a different way of living with a body (Lindgren, 2004, p. 152). Living with an unruly and/or deviant body means that “it is no longer possible to do so in a taken-for-granted, unconscious way” (Lindgren, 2004, p. 152). Rather, the body consistently asserts its presence, demanding meaningful attention and insisting upon a new, more relevant corporeal schema. The body that acts and is acted upon, that rebels against a socially impacted and impacting notion of self, speaks back in sometimes distressing, sometimes exciting ways. Embodiment in this sense is not exclusive to crip bodies, but it is often more explicitly experienced. The kind of bodily strangeness and affective disruption located within and emerging from crip bodies described here speak to a particular conceptualization of bodies as

sites of resonance and potential. Massumi (2002) writes that the body's "activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential" (p. 31). That is, a material body speaks back and disturbs the normativity of the taken-for-granted, common sense experience of bodily stability that is only possible within an experience of able-bodiedness. The destabilization of embodiment and the allowance for the experiencing of bodies as spaces of limitless potential, never fully contained by normative discourses, proves especially useful to the study of normative forms of embodiment: a project very much in line with McRuer's (2006) crip theory, Johnson and McRuer's (2014) cripistemologies, and Puar's (2009) queer disability theory.

Davis (2013) explores the emergence of the category "normal" and "deviant" in the mid 20th century within the context of disability and illness. He writes, "with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes. When we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants" (Davis, 2013, p. 3). The production of the deviant body can be traced back to the Classical Age, where the body came under scrutiny as an object of discipline and control, one that could be harnessed to particular social, political, and economic ends (Foucault, 1995). Foucault (1995) discusses the historical construction of the "docile body," writing that "a body is docile that it may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (p. 136). This notion of bodies as malleable substances produces not only the notion of docile bodies, but also the spectre of deviant bodies: bodies that exceed the bounds of that which is considered useful and productive. Since the docile body was and is never fully accomplished, but rather given the appearance of stability through complex processes of discipline and enforcement at the micro- and macro- level, the deviant body emerges as both challenge to and legitimation of the production of docile bodies (Foucault,

1995). It exposes the possibility for boundary transgression at the same time as it is harnessed as a disciplinary technique; one that lends meaning and privilege to the disciplined, docile body through comparison.

The manufacturing of the disabled body as deviant and resulting disciplinary techniques continue to influence not only popular representations of disability, but medical, social, and political institutions' approaches to disability and disabled people. Here, a combined approach, incorporating both DeleuzoGuattarian formulations of affect and Foucauldian analyses of biopower, is useful as it exposes an unstable, but meaningful, trajectory. The construction of normative and deviant bodies flattens the radical potential of embodied affect, channeling the sensation and feeling of bodily potential into dichotomous categories (normal or deviant) privileging one over another. Different experiences of embodiment are denied insofar as social intelligibility relies on participation in a hierarchical relationship between bodies. The downers—those that remain regardless of all attempts to erase or contain them—point to the moments where bodies resist management. If we cannot institutionalize, treat, cure, then we cannot incorporate via medical technologies. Downers are doomed.

We might productively approach deviance, despair, and doom as productive and generative. Cvetkovich (2012) asserts the political efficacy of these “negative” feelings, drawing attention to the ways in which they provide valuable forms of insight into emotion and affect, as well as proposals for hope and optimism that have largely gone unrealized. Depression, for Cvetkovich (2012), is a starting point for a radical analysis of economic, political, and affective positionalities. Her analysis “aims to be patient with the moods and temporalities of depression, not moving too quickly to recuperate them or put them to good use” (Cvetkovich. 2012, p. 14). It points to the radical potential in letting “depression linger, to explore the feeling or remaining or

resting in sadness without insisting that it be transformed or reconceived” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 14). Going further, the power of downers is not just about depressive “feelings.” It is also a matter of sensation and affect.

“Remaining or resting in sadness” is not necessarily about stasis (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 14). It can also point to a “creative affirmation of a new ontology” (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 8), for “materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 9). Materiality, here, speaks to theories emerging within the humanities and social sciences that form alliances with different branches of physics (notably, chaos theory and complexity theory), uncovering generative analyses where notoriously problematic essentialist theories once dominated (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 13). Furthermore, these analyses, provisionally accumulated under the heading “new materialisms,” approach the biological as mobile matter, proliferating “reappraisal[s] of organisms as discrete, autonomous units with relatively tidy, bounded causal patterns” (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 17), and engaging with environmental and technological interventions that challenge the terms whereby a body comes to be human.

Downer materiality similarly engages the biological, understood as infinitely relational. It is an explosive matter-ing of electrical mis-firings and chemical upsets. It emerges from flesh and bone and benzos and smog. It is “as much becoming as it is being; it is durational as much as it is spatial” (Grosz, 2010, p. 145). Downer materiality speaks to the relational and affective aspects of matter, where “bodies communicate with other bodies through their gestures and conduct to arouse visceral responses and prompt forms of judgment that do not necessarily pass through conscious awareness” (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 20). Rather than attempt to pin down

these responses as they circulate among bodies, objects, and environments, becoming downer embraces the unpredictability and infinitely mobile aspects of matter, biological and otherwise.

Downer materiality involves the proliferation of bad feelings and their chaotic, unpredictable interferences and accompaniments. Bad feelings call upon and take up the rotten, filthy, messy, decaying flesh of downer bodies and put that matter in motion. In this formulation, the downers are not figures to be silenced, erased, or dismissed. They are forces to be reckoned with, signaling distinctly crip forms of hope, optimism, and futurity that prove more sustainable and transformative than the pursuit of happiness ever has or ever can. A meaningful embrace of downers entails “a search for utopia that doesn’t make a simple distinction between good or bad feelings or assume that good politics can only emerge from good feelings; feeling bad might, in fact, be the ground for transformation” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 2-3).

Writing encounters

This thesis engages with affective experiences of disability that are silenced within dominant discourses of disability theory. In order to tease out the particularities of the silences and absences I address, I examine various instances of life writing/life narrative, focusing on the tellings of disabled, queer, and/or racialized writers. Within my research, there is a great deal of motion and overlap between primary and secondary sources and creative and scholarly texts. Much of the theory I engage with writes and/or performs affects and sensations at the same time as it explores their content and form (or lack thereof). Likewise, much of the life writing I engage with has explicitly theoretical implications.

I use multimodal discourse analysis to explore various forms of life writing or life narrative, understood as attempts to communicate bodies and selves within and sometimes

beyond particular social, political, economic contexts. I focus on the ways in which processes of meaning making, communication, and engagement are themselves affective encounters among bodies. While dominant analyses of life writing often position it as a means of communicating, and in the process constructing, a particular self, I will read these texts for the moments where affects erupt into the text: where appealing to a stable self to tell proves impossible, and the complicated, messy aspects of corporeal experiences emerge. I look at various life narratives that are part of the recent proliferation of what Couser (2013) refers to as “disability autobiographies” and memoirs. One of the promises of this burgeoning genre is the relatively popular idea that “[t]he autobiographical act models the agency and self-determination that the disability rights movement has fought for” (Couser, 2013, p. 458). In a context where non-normative bodies are often expected to narrate or explain their somatic difference, and where such narrations are intelligible only when they allow for the relief of discomfort produced by the presence of deviant bodies, the promise of disabled self-representation is, of course, appealing. However, understandings of self-representation to which Couser (2013) refers run counter to this thesis’ fundamental challenge to the idea that “selves,” as isolated, static units, are worth such an appeal.

I draw from influential feminist theory that interrogates notions of agency and selfhood, proposing forms of radical politics that challenge identity-based movements through discursive analysis. Butler (1992) critiques appeals to self-evident political subjectivities, noting that the creation of self-evident subjects is always mired in violent exclusions; uneven relations of power necessarily emerge. An appeal for readings of subjectivity and bodies that moves critically is meant to challenge normative power structures. However, theoretical feats of deconstruction of primarily fixed terms (e.g., woman) do not mean the dissolution of some foundations of feminist

politics, as many feminist activists and theorists have fiercely guarded against. What is proposed is an opening up of language and subjectivity in ways that might be more relevant to similarly flexible, shifting, and contingent operations of power.

To take construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject . . . on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that which the term, “the subject,” refers, and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or to dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps more importantly, to open up a term, like the subject, to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized. (Butler, 1992, p. 15)

This thesis concerns itself with unauthorized accounts, noting the ways in which they are avoided and ignored to serve certain political interests at the expense of a more perilous approach that might prove more promising.

Relating to these critiques, reading life narratives raises further conundrums with respect to the operation of the term “experience” and its normative uses. Scott (1992) interrogates the term, pointing to its elisions and exclusions. Scott (1992) notes: “When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject . . . becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built” (p. 25). As the individual subject is problematized, so are questions of origin and what constitutes evidence. However, Scott (1992) does not do away with experience. Rather, she approaches it as a linguistic tool that can be put to different uses. For Scott (1992), “Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political” (p. 37). Here, Butler (1992) and Scott (1992) demonstrate

some critiques put forward within critical, deconstructive feminist theory, ones to which this thesis is deeply indebted. The massive question mark hovering over “subjectivity” remains. The persistence of subjectivity demonstrates its centrality to western theory and activism, for better or for worse. In the following text, I draw from Butler (1992) and Scott’s (1992) analyses and take subjectivity and experience as “useful to work with,” continuing to “analyze [their] operations and to redefine [their] meaning” (Scott, 1992, p. 37). What differs, here, is my degree of attachment to this term. At times, subjectivity, as an heuristic tool, seems unavoidable, in part because it is so ubiquitous. A clarification between “bounded” subjectivities and proliferating subjectivities is useful, here. However, my usage is ambivalent and often lacking in sincerity. Indeed, it is deliberately ironic.

In the following analysis, selves can be said to exist only insofar as they are understood as series of moments within a durational frame of movement and encounter, rendering prevailing notions of self-representation untenable. Drawing from recent work looking at intersections between queer theory and theories of the inhuman (non-human, post-human, etc.), (Chen, 2015; Chen and Luciano, 2015), my engagements with life narratives always already challenge what “life” means in which contexts and to what effects. What interests me within life writing and/or narration are not self-representations or the articulation of livable forms of life and livelihood, so much as the moments where the static, linear forms of the conventional disability autobiography or memoir are temporarily disrupted. They might be brief, easy to overlook. They might be hugely impactful. More often than not, they are both.

The texts I will engage with involve multiple mediums and genres, which relates to two key assertions. Disability and debility often result in the production of alternative communication methods: that is, methods that challenge conventional notions of speech and writing. Therefore,

multiple mediums allow for a broader range of narration that is more suitable to this thesis' focus on disability and debility. Additionally, given the multiple, shifting, unruly aspects of affects, a more flexible form of scholarly analysis and production is necessary. A study of multi-modal life narratives will leave space for the creative process that could answer the challenge Stewart (2007) puts forward regarding the writing of affect. She asserts the importance of abandoning any search "to finally 'know' [affects]—to collect them into a good enough story of what's going on—but to fashion some form of address that is adequate to their form" (Stewart, 2007, p. 4). The specific life narrative texts I will be engaging with were chosen from a wide range of texts written by authors whose work centres anti-normative forms of embodiment, keeping in mind that the theoretical frameworks I employ, notably crip theory, post/de/anti-colonial theory, and queer theory, exhibit the greatest similarity in that they all take a "radical stance toward concepts of normalcy; [all] argue adamantly against the compulsion to observe norms of all kinds (corporeal, mental, sexual, social, cultural, subcultural etc.)" (Sandahl, 2003, p. 26).

My exploration in the first chapter of relationships and relationality as viewed through the lens of "care," examines an audio recording of a panel, titled "Organizing Disability Justice: Accountability, Care, and Relationship Building" (Erickson, Khor, Ndopu, and Withers, 2014). The panel consists of Loree Erickson, Masti Khor, A.J. Withers, and Eddie Ndopu. The panel presents explicitly politicized explorations of relationships and care within the context of radical disability justice communities and elucidates some of the ways in which bodies are positioned in relation to each other in different ways with different meanings, effects, and affects. Rhetorical choices and repetition among the speakers' contributions are examined. I also look at the full text of an article by Ndopu (2013), excerpts of which are included in the panel, as providing a less restricted understanding of care and relationships, retaining many of the political commitments

exhibited in the panel, but proposing a more nuanced corporeal narrative. I end with a reading of Finkelstein's (2003) "The Only Thing you Have to do is Live," as a model for thinking relationality as a series of ecstatic and/or violent collisions, rather than compassionate cooperation.

In my second chapter exploring forms of experimental embodiment, I look at *Lose Your Mother* by Hartman (2007), delving into colonial affect and pain as processes played out in collisions between time, space, and bodies, disrupting dominant spatial, temporal, emotive, and affective trajectories. I approach the affective framework Hartman's (2007) writing performs is approached as particularly generative; I then examine it through post-colonial texts that take up affect in meaningful and interesting ways. My use of necropolitics (Weheliye, 2014) and queer inhumanisms (Chen and Luciano, 2015) will figure prominently, here. I will also bring in Preciado's (2013) *Testo Junkie*. Preciado's (2013) text speaks to another experimental form of corporeal expression, amalgamating theory, history, and memoir and simultaneously failing, creatively and productively, to exemplify any of the three. Epistolary and corporeal contamination coexist in *Testo Junkie*, speaking to the infinite number of moments and events that make up material processes in what Preciado (2013), referencing the post-Fordist economy and its treatment of bodies (human and otherwise), terms, "pharmacopornographic capitalism."

Probyn (2009) notes that: "writing is a corporeal activity. We work ideas through our bodies; we write through out bodies, hoping to get into the bodies of our readers. We write about society not as an abstraction but as composed of actual bodies in proximity to other bodies" (p. 76). In researching and writing this thesis, I am interested in the points where the corporeal aspects of knowledge production make themselves known, even if only for a second. Probyn's (2009) articulation of "a shame induced ethics of writing" further describes what I intend to do

here: that is, write reflexively, critically, and with a degree of anxiety, all motivating a more responsive and relevant practice with respect to the bodies who encounter this thesis and vice versa. As Probyn (2009) powerfully and accurately notes, “The body of the writer becomes the battleground where ideas and experiences collide, sometimes to produce new visions of life” (p. 89). Throughout my research process, I will look for these collisions and propel them into the monstrous assemblages this thesis enlists.

I, like many others, have developed sound bytes to try and address the mis-fits in my experiences of being a body. These are my desperate responses to a body that won't stop inserting itself no matter how hard I try to shut it out. Past symptoms are always layering on new ones, or more pronounced ones, and now I can only ever go through the motions with an always changing, unpredictable body. This thesis is a piece of that process—the process of living with a body that moves, a body that breathes, absorbs, responds, changes. It is also something of a turning point. Not a start or an end, but a shift marked by a perverse curiosity, for I can't shake that feeling that when my body rebels, does things I hate but somehow can't stop, demands attention, then there must be something in that. Theory has always been a way for me to think through points of confusion and unease. Now, I'm attempting to think through bodies and affects—not *my* bodies and affects, for they are never only mine, but rather bodies-in-relation to something that exceeds discourse, linguistic frameworks, the symbolic, whatever you want to call it. Not *a* body, not *the* body, but something that exists only in relation to its environments and what populates them. This thesis is an exercise in thinking before, after, in excess of the somatic fictions offered, produced, and circulated around flesh. It's me entering into a conversation with the points where the actions of my body resist all of my best intentions and finding a way of speaking that which often goes without saying. This is me becoming downer.

This cyborg manifesto

As I write this, thirty electrodes are fused with my scalp, secured by toxic glue and tiny bits of gauze covered with a net that resembles the shipping material used to protect Ya pears during their intercontinental journeys. Tiny wires distinguished by their variously dyed plastic coatings sprout from each electrode, gathered into a bundle at the base of my neck and cascading down into a little pouch I carry with me at all times, like Rapunzel if Rapunzel were a character in *The Fifth Element*. It contains what looks kind of like an internet modem all of the wires connect to, and some spare batteries, just in case. These chips and wires and whatever they are, half concealed in sleek, white plastic, read my brain, recording each and every electrical impulse (or, at times, the disruptions caused by vigorous chewing). It's especially interested in impulses that deviate from expected trajectories, producing so many movements, twitches, shifts in perception. Mostly, I've grown accustomed to these mis-firings, barely noticing them, if at all. These tiny electrodes, pinching my scalp; the pouch whose strap constantly gets in my way; the layers of grime building on my body that can't be showered off (electricity and water seem to have a complicated relationship) all draw my attention to the deviations from my distant, foggy, tenuous, and largely second-hand memory of what "normal" is.

Right now, I am the science fiction version of myself. I walk among the "humans" eliciting guilty stares from strangers: pity, hilarity, curiosity. In line for coffee, a child turns to their parent and asks, "what is she?" It's October 29th. I assume they're asking what my Halloween costume is, but I also suspect that they're asking what this strange, frightening, monstrous creature in their midst is. Like many artificial creatures, I require maintenance and am

unable to perform it myself. My partner has to go to work. I stop by at noon to have my batteries changed. Her boss laughs. So do I. It's funny.

I bus to campus. Part of this experience is doing all of the things that put my body in stress. The bus involves a solid hour, both ways, of sitting in a cloud of perfumes and scents that make me ill. On campus, the anxiety that two terms of social trauma have instilled rears up. As usual, I walk quickly with my eyes to the ground, desperately hoping that I won't run into anyone from my cohort. I enter my supervisor's office with a sense of relief—no terrifying encounters as of yet. We talk, I try to listen, I'm exhausted from the stress my body has been under these past few days. I feel as though we're speaking through a thick and heavy cloud of smog. Science fiction Sydney fails the Turing test.

At this moment I am more connected, literally and figuratively, to the electrodes and wires and modem than I am to the humans that surround me. I exist in relation to and as part of this technological assemblage. I understand my body to be less human than before; *less human than those around me*. I long for the company of other cyborgs at the same time as I fear it. If I join the others, will I be able to find my way back to my previous form? It's a scary thought. Analytically, I understand my environment to only ever involve degrees of humanity, animacy, life, but in my robot guts, I cling to whatever human privilege I can muster. I yearn and I rage. I count the minutes until I return to the hospital and have the expert humans remove my inconvenient appendages.

The above experience is not singular or exceptional. It enters as a moment in my writing process, one that (fortuitously?) propels a particular theoretical narrative at the same time as it relates to a kind of corporeal chaos that temporarily forecloses other modes of research and writing. This narrative is a linguistic tool put to use in part because of its relevance and in part

because using it makes the process more bearable. In the life narratives I study, other rhetorical strategies emerge as surely as my own. It is a conceit to consider mine somehow more valuable or interesting. However, it is a productive and necessary conceit. Belief in the value of my words makes their writing possible. It is just as important as the perpetual skepticism and paranoia Probyn (2009) advocates, and remains in generative tension with it. Faith and skepticism emerge as complementary strategies.

Chapter 2: Corporeal Collisions

There is nothing more fundamental to human bodies than need. However, the ways in which need is identified and addressed vary considerably across social, political, economic, and corporeal contexts. Hoppania and Vaittinen (2015) write: “as long as our bodies need other bodies for survival and subsistence, there is relatedness of care that continues to make the economy political” (p. 72). Two key tenets emerge from this statement. Firstly, Hoppania and Vaittinen (2015) point to a fundamental characteristic of bodies: need. For people with disabilities, need has added significance, not in the sense that they are bodies who inherently need *more* (though in certain material circumstances this could be considered true), but more meaningfully in the sense that their bodies are intimately aligned with need in complex and multi-dimensional ways not universally experienced. Secondly, it points to the ways in which care always: 1) relates to need; 2) entails relations between bodies; and 3) circulates within social, political, and corporeal economies. Care can signal a broad range of practices and proposals. Care can be considered a labour practice, emotional investment, familial obligation, mental and/or physical encumbrance, gendered expectation and more. This abundance of meaning undermines the specificity of care in ways that make space for complex, multi-dimensional readings that prove especially relevant for crip bodies and the environments in which they circulate. Unseating care from its discursive moorings and putting it in motion allows for a closer look at its affective and material elements.

In this chapter, I examine intersections between affective experiences of care and their discursive enunciation. A panel by a group of radical queer disability justice communities is explored as exemplary of competing discourses surrounding affective economies of care. From there, I look to Ahuja’s (2015) work on atmospheric intimacies, Chen’s (2011) work on toxicity

and “queer bonds,” and Manalansan IV’s (2010) work on “disaffection” to tease out a more generative notion of affective relations between and beyond human bodies, one that takes seriously the assertion that care is, first and foremost, a corporeal (broadly conceived) relation (Erickson et al., 2014; Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015). I will finish with an examination of Finkelstein’s (2003) “All you have to do is live,” a short piece of life writing that illustrates a model of relationships that may not immediately be identified as “caring”. Indeed, it is its divergence from normative understandings of care that is informative and meaningful. Reading this piece alongside Bersani’s (2010) seminal work, “Is the rectum a grave?” I will explore the potential of the relations between and among bodies these authors articulate. It is my argument that the kind of care that arises from and responds to physical need might be more meaningfully and sustainably approached through the radical dissolution of selves, rather than the superficial finagling with subjectivities that has already fallen short.

The broad scope of care, as well as the contradictions and convergences within and emerging from its conceptual bounds, render the term unwieldy and questionably useful as a point of reference. For the purposes of the following analysis, I will conceive of care as a corporeal relation, that is, as a series of overlapping relationships between bodies that centres need (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015). This conception does not attempt to resolve or flatten theoretical and practical conflicts; rather, it approaches care as something that is always already suspect in terms of its motivations, manifestations, and material effects. Interactions between bodies that typically fall under the umbrella of care, here, warrant a reconceptualization, where forms of relationality that challenge prior theorizations of care are examined for their disruptive and generative qualities rather than their potential for neoliberal recuperation.

Understanding care as a series of encounters between bodies underlines the ways in which care is inherently relational, regardless of whether it refers to a set of material practices or an affective investment (not that the two are easily distinguishable or without overlap). Understanding care as a relation between bodies also raises questions of independence and dependence, widely approached as mutually exclusive and positioned asymmetrically in relation to various forms of power and privilege. These questions are central to any discussion of care. Grenier (2003) observes not only a socially, politically, and economically loaded distinction between notions of independence and dependence but also, moments of slippage and ambivalence in their meanings and usages. In addition to the much explored and routinely cited dynamics whereby independence comes to signal an ideal and dependence its antagonist, Grenier (2003) goes on to cite the emergence of terms such as “functional independence,” which has gained popularity within various social and health service institutions catering towards people with disabilities (PwDs). This shift in terminology implies increased access to the rights and privileges associated with citizenship in the neoliberal nation-state that are routinely denied to PwDs. Such a shift, however, is promising only in the most rhetorical sense. Upon closer examination, “this use of *independence* reflects appropriated modern western elements of choice and individual responsibility and lends itself to the new business rhetoric within care” (Grenier, 2003, p. 34). As care is framed more and more in market terms, its practice becomes increasingly commoditized and moves for greater independence more often than not produce a reduction rather than expansion of care options for the majority of PwDs.

For PwDs and others, the commoditization of care has resulted in increasing dependence on consumer capitalism and its logics. For those who have the spending power, independence is an accessible commodity. For those without, there is an ever increasing sense of stigma

associated with what is seen as a lack of responsibility for one's health. This dynamic is exacerbated by the gradual decline of the welfare state and increasing imposition of various austerity measures, resulting in cuts to funding for the government sponsored health care and income security programs on which low- or no-income PwDs often exclusively depend. In Canada, health services that were once considered essential are being selectively delisted with hugely uneven effects. At the same time as care is being downloaded onto families, with women taking on the bulk of care work, workers performing supposedly low-skilled care related services (predominantly racialized, lower-working class women) are experiencing diminishing wages and increased workplace precarity. Independence comes at a cost that most cannot afford.

Simultaneously, certain forms of dependence are becoming more and more central to the functioning of the current landscape of consumer capitalism. Independence, though retaining a degree of discursive importance, is no longer enough for neoliberalism, and a certain appeal has been found and taken up in dependence that complicates previously straightforward distinctions between the two. In this way, the idea (though not necessarily the rhetoric) of interdependence emerges as an attractive political ideal, despite and/or because it is readily available for absorption into neoliberal infrastructures. It mobilizes notions of dependence and debility and literally capitalizes on them. Puar (2009) notes that, "the knitting together of finance capitalism and the medical-industrial complex means that debility pays, and pays well" (p. 149). Interdependence, as a positive framing that weaves together capitalist profit, heteronormativity, state power, able-bodied privilege, and compulsory debility, produces an incredibly loaded linguistic site ripe with economic, political, and social utility.

Interdependence as a concept and practice has been taken up by many disability activists and scholars as a useful framework for conceiving of care practices in ways that move beyond a

dependence/independence binary. Grenier's (2003) constructions of independence and dependence hinge on understandings of productivity and unproductivity that have historically marginalized PwDs. Productivity, here, is largely understood in terms of one's participation in a particular labour market. Relatedly, citizenship, broadly conceived, is dependent on a person's ability to act as both consumer and producer within a neoliberal marketplace. The notion of interdependence responds to a preoccupation within disability activism and theory with unpacking notions of productivity, non-productivity, and citizenship. These moves have been dominated by attempts to expand notions of productivity (associated with independence) to include PwDs, shoring up its bounds rather than challenging neoliberal biases. The refunctioning of the term productivity to include contributions by PwDs makes possible the characterization of such bodies as interdependent, instead of simply dependent. Rather than undermine constructions of independence and dependence in ways with further reaching implications, many caring practices espoused in mainstream disability theory and politics make use of discourses that work for change in the lives of a relatively small number of PwDs, and in very limited terms. Those terms are explicitly or implicitly complementary to consumer capitalism.

Where interdependence is proffered as a political and practical alternative to problematic adoptions of the dependence/independence binary, asymmetrical power relations at work within affective economies of care are often sidestepped if not completely obscured. Radical interdependence has little to say about job security for live-in caregivers or nursing aids. As an analytical and material practice, it neither poses, nor does it leave space for, transformative challenges to the complex and multi-faceted meanings care has taken on in a post-Fordist economy. Of obvious relevance is the manner in which much care labour is commoditized in a global, neoliberal economy. Considering both dependence and independence as commodities

raises a very complicated set of dynamics. The meaning of productivity is becoming less and less tied to the citizen-worker model of industrial capitalism and more and more oriented towards bodies as porous sites of data production and dissemination, functioning as a kind of floating currency. As prior formulations of labour market productivity shift and/or partially dissolve, embodied capacity and debility take on new significance. Puar (2009) writes: “neoliberal regimes of biocapital produce the body as never healthy enough, and thus always in a debilitated state in relation to what one’s bodily capacity is imagined to be” (p. 167). Bodily debility, then, is not a challenge to new forms of capital exchange. It is a requirement. Bodies experience this shift very differently in relation to their social, economic, political, and temporal locations. The question, then, is not which bodies get to be independent and which do not. Rather, it relates to which bodies can afford to circulate comfortably in an economy of debility, and which are made to bear the burden of such economies.

Performing relationships

Many radical crip communities have emerged as sites in which alternative forms and practices of care are conceived of and proposed. In a 2014 panel titled “Organizing Disability Justice: Accountability, Care, and Relationship Building,” Loree Erickson, Masti Khor, A.J. Withers, and Eddie Ndopu, all relatively well-known disability justice activists and/or artists and/or academics based in Toronto, demonstrate the ways in which self-narration is central to political discourses and practices of care. The narrations in this panel rely on loosely crafted but nonetheless effective scripts. The topic of care, in all of its discursive forms, runs throughout these discussions of relationship building. Engaging with the topic at hand, all of the panelists weave together genres such as political rhetoric, informal conversation, and academic presentation,

formulating life narratives that serve as both testimony and call to action. Talking through experiences of their bodies, their political investments, their relationships with others, etc., the panelists frame their experiences in ways that are remarkably harmonious. Especially where bodies are concerned, such collective coherence is suspect. What proves most interesting are the moments where bodies and their affects disrupt the text, however briefly. I will read this panel both for the kinds of narrative frameworks that crip bodies find available, as well as for the places where bodies diverge from and/or exceed those frameworks.

Consistent within these accounts is the value placed on interdependence within “chosen families” and disability justice movements more broadly. The phrase “chosen family” is commonly used as a way to expand what is meant by kinship. It has been and is part of a larger challenge to structures of care that arise from hetero-normative family models, including gendered expectations surrounding domesticity and care work. Its circulations, however, perform very differently. “Chosen,” here, takes up enlightenment, neoliberal understandings of “choice” as referencing freely chosen decisions emerging from individual subjects. While not necessarily intended by activists taking up this rhetoric, this framing undermines challenges to the privileging of heteronormative family structures. Two key investments are at work in the rhetoric of choice and kinship: 1) a belief in individual, self-aware, purely agentic subjects capable of such acts of choosing; and 2) an established set of emotional and practical structures that make up kinship taken from the same normative family models that the use of terms such as chosen family aim to challenge. Rather than complicate the production of nuclear families, the phrase chosen family yokes radical forms of kinship to norms associated with presumably not chosen families, depoliticizing relations between the two. While deviations may present themselves, foundational expectations remain similar if not identical.

The critiques put forward in these limited challenges to normative family structures speak to earlier discussions of care within feminist and anti-racist intellectual and activist work (Davis, 1981; Firestone, 2003; Gilligan, 1993; Kittay, 1996). Gendered—and to a problematically lesser degree, racialized—dynamics of care work were explored. Dominant constructions of family and the kinds of domestic and caring labour occurring within the bounds of the term were put under the microscope. Overlapping bodies of work, including Marxist or socialist feminism, invoked activist projects such as “wages for housework” and/or the abolition of housework (Firestone, 2003). Additionally, conceptual and practical investments situated under the umbrella of care have been approached for their particular ethical implications, many of them desirable (Gilligan, 1993; Kittay, 1996; Koggel and Orme, 2010, 2011). Two key contributions from these divergent but overlapping bodies of work emerge in the contemporary disability justice communities to which the “Organizing Disability Justice” panel speaks (Erickson et al., 2014). First, there is the now ubiquitous assertion that the personal is political, here, referencing the ways in which domestic care work—devalued in large part due to its invisibility in the so-called private sphere of the hetero-patriarchal family—is fundamentally gendered. Second, there is the identification of a male dominated public sphere that has systemically disenfranchised women and other oppressed groups. The yoking of women to the family/private sphere is considered part and parcel of sexist oppression, as is the devaluation of domestic and care work. In all of these strands of theory, the hetero-patriarchal family is considered part and parcel of male privilege and the oppression of women.

The motivations underlying the use of the term “chosen family” can be related to feminist care ethics or the ethics of care that have their own rich history within feminist theory. Taking into account many of the aforementioned critiques, feminist care ethics “emphasizes the

importance of context, interdependence, and relationships, and responsibilities to concrete others” (Koggel and Orme, 2010). The move to highlight the context in which care, as ethic and practice, occurs leaves space for a radical critique of domestic labour and hetero-patriarchal families while retaining an appreciation for empathy and care that might challenge androcentric emotive, political, and theoretical norms that devalue and obscure the ethical value of feminist theories of care. These theoretical and praxis-oriented commitments appear at various points in the following discussion, evidencing indebtedness to feminist scholarship and activism.

Additionally, challenges put to notions of individual autonomy and agency in this text draw from and have much in common with a great deal of feminist theory (Friedman, 1997; Grosz, 2010; Kittay, 1997). Grosz (2010) notes: “[c]oncepts of autonomy, agency, and freedom . . . have functioned as a kind of mantra of liberation, a given ideal, not only for a politics directed to feminist questions, but to any politics directed to class, race, or national and ethnic struggles” (p. 139). Just so, much disability justice activism and theory has, intentionally or not, taken up notions of independence, autonomy, and agency, evidenced by common preoccupations with independent living or working arrangements. At the same time, radical critiques of the overvaluation of independence have re-centred neoliberal productions of subjectivity in discussions of chosen families. The invocation of chosen families perpetuates apolitical notions of choice and agency and often counter-intuitively proliferates hetero-patriarchal family norms. Interdependence returns as a political framing meant to address conceptual and practical conflicts between neoliberal emphases on both independence and debility. Both in spite and because of allegiances (conscious or otherwise) to prior feminist theory, it remains unable to do so.

It is also important to note that interdependence as concept and practice is not a new or revolutionary phenomenon, neither is it located in a romanticized past that is simultaneously

utopic. It is very much here and now. Dominant applications of interdependence as practice and promise are, more often than not, part of oppressive infrastructures that exclude the bulk of people with disabilities. For example, many normative enactments of care can be and are commonly read as reciprocal or interdependent. These are often forms of care most in keeping with heteronormativity and compulsory able-bodied-ness. To care for *each other* is the domain of the heterosexual family, whether those bonds be romantic or associated with blood relatives (or socially legitimate surrogates). When processes of aging, illness, disability, impairment, debility etc. enter such relationships, the mutually beneficial connotations of care are immediately and necessarily reworked, but not completely abandoned. There is a cared-for person and a person who cares, and the relationship between them is characterized by a singular dependence, but that dependence does not necessarily put stress on social, political, and economic relations of privilege. Rather, certain forms of dependence are considered legitimate, important, and profitable. The availability and accessibility of being considered legitimately dependent varies and is very much related to one's gender, age, sexuality, disability/ability, race, class, nationality, etc. Obvious examples include children's dependence on adults, a relatively recent construction that has firmly established itself as beyond critique. This dynamic is directly tied to a heteronormative understanding of not only relationships and familial structures but also notions of an appropriate life course (counter-intuitively, aging, despite its universality, is not similarly embraced). The dependence of children, while taken as a universal good in its own right, is also tied to an assumed future of caregiving. Dependence, then, is seen as a temporary state to be later supplemented, forming a circuit of conceptual interdependence over a relatively large length of time characteristic of hetero-normative constructions of a legitimate life course.

The example of children, here, is especially adept at speaking to what Edelman (2004) terms, “reproductive futurism,” where the figure of the child (more specifically, a white, middle-to upper-class, decidedly not queer, “healthy” child) comes to stand in for a future and vice versa. In fact, this dynamic might better be articulated as one in which “the children are our future,” implying that the two not only speak to each other, but that they are one and the same. If children are, indeed, our future, then only through the heteronormative matrix of the family can queers and crips achieve social and political intelligibility. This is a family that takes care of each other, in theory if not in practice. The figural importance of interdependence is secured within the bounds of hetero- and homo-normative family structures. Queer, crip chosen families that care for one another are, more often than not, a fully compatible deviation from increasingly flexible normative family models of interdependence. As such, they contribute to the formation of a queer, crip form of interdependence that accommodates neoliberal economies of debility.

In the “Organizing disability justice” panel, the ways in which care and relationship building are repeatedly positioned as “movement work” also proves complementary to neoliberal economies of debility (Erickson et al., 2014). Repeated assurances that movement work is most definitely *work* highlight the ways in which it is always already politicized. The kind of care/movement work raised during the panel ranges from sending a text telling a person having a bad cognitive day where they live to hanging out with someone in a bathroom (Erickson et al., 2014). Work, particularly when considering notions of care and disability, is a loaded term. It immediately draws on and legitimates notions of neoliberal productivity, folding in bodies from the margins while neutralizing their implicit critiques. Masti Khor, even as she is taking up the term work in relation to care and relationship building, points explicitly to its problematic elements, alternating between identifications of capitalist logics of production and the

professionalization of care while simultaneously stating, “We need to take care of each other, but that is the work. It’s not a tangent, it’s not an inconvenience, it’s not a whimsy, or some other sexist word for work. It’s work” (Erickson et al, 2014). To articulate care as decidedly *not* tangential, *not* inconvenient, and *not* whimsical erases meaningful and important experiences of care work that might be some or all of those things.

Dirt, disgust, death

In their contribution to “Organizing Disability Justice,” Khor discusses performance art pieces they have done in recent history (Erickson et al., 2014). While certain elements of playfulness can be read throughout Khor’s contribution to the panel, their discussion of their performance art indicates a decided emphasis on humour, mischievousness, and that which is delightfully tangential to work: play. Khor states, “I like to use burlesque as a medium because it’s incredibly over the top and comedic and it’s easy to engage audiences without inciting their pity because they’re more likely to go ‘oh, that’s really hot,’ than ‘oh, poor you, you’re talking about chronic pain’” (Erickson et. al, 2014). In one of the burlesque performances Khor references, they perform a pain flare and seek out various symbols of relief (objects with external references) from a box labeled “pain relief” (Erickson et. al, 2014). One is a pill bottle with the word “shame” emblazoned on the bottom. Khor continues to reach for more and more items, not finding an adequate address to their pain. Finally, they realize “that the pain box is actually the medical industrial complex in disguise!” (Erickson et. al, 2014). Exploring the serious subject matter of care and oppression through a sense of play and whimsy, Khor communicates a kind of marginalized embodiment that differs from agreed upon understandings of compulsory able-bodied-ness and heteronormativity, as well as imperatives towards understandings of normative

productivity that often accompany both radical and conservative approaches to disability and queerness (Erickson et al., 2014). In their performance, play, politicized from the start, is apt to communicate affective pain and struggle. Care manifests as a form of play, and productively so.

Khor also performs momentary interruptions or tangents to prevailing threads of discussion elsewhere. They move beyond well-established critiques of capitalism whose limits have been explored here, pointing towards a kind of critical engagement with negativity that doesn't point to an imagined happy future. They write: "rather than projecting your fears onto our bodies as either the ones to pity or the valiant noble super crips . . . you can just be present with your fear, and your disgust, or your disgust at your disgust" (Erickson et al., 2014). The affective force emerging from the word disgust, a word that bridges emotion and sensation, points towards a form of deviant corporeality that can and must be taken up for bodies to coexist in potentially generative ways. Disappointingly, one sentence later, the disgust Khor invites is given a caveat. "I'm not saying that we need to punish ourselves or anyone needs to punish anyone . . . in fact, I think punishing probably wouldn't work, but to hold compassion and space for yourself and your feelings" (Erickson et al., 2014). In all of this messy, unpleasant movement work, compassion is the light at the end of the tunnel, an alternative to the punishment enacted through the mobilization of negative affects like disgust. Much like happiness, compassion is a promise toward which we are directed. Rather than reveling in revulsion, we put it behind us. This passage exemplifies both the inevitability of negativity and its simultaneous social unintelligibility. If disgust and fear are voiced, the social, political, and economic imperative is that they be directed toward positive resolution.

Loree Erickson, one of the panelists and a relatively well known disability justice activist, talks at length about her experiences with her care collective: a group of people from radical

communities in her area who collectively organize the day-to-day care practices that sustain Erickson (Erickson et al., 2014). Throughout her contribution to the panel, Erickson makes 13 references (in a 19 minute talk) to bathrooms as a site where caring practices play out in her life (Erickson et al., 2014). For Erickson, the bathroom is a multi dimensional space. She identifies it as an everyday complication in terms of having to organize assistance multiple times a day, but what she emphasizes in her talk is that it is also a place where she and those engaging in care practices with her “hang out;” and where she “learn[s] so much about people’s lived experiences” (Erickson et al., 2014). Additionally, she writes: “the amount of disability justice work that I do from my toilet is staggering” (Erickson et al., 2014). Erickson’s discussion of bathrooms and time spent in them builds to what is presented as a conscious decision, in keeping with constructions of autonomous individuals. She states: “one day I was like if I’m going to spend 8-9 hours of my life every day, like, going to the bathroom and doing care stuff, I want it to be enjoyable” (Erickson et al., 2014). Erickson’s bathroom references, even while they emphasize social and productive aspects, unavoidably raise spectres of shit, urine, nudity that normatively resists eroticization, and other socially taboo topics. Still, in order for the positivity built into Erickson’s narrative to sustain itself, there can be no meaningful, nuanced discussion of those aspects of caregiving that are affectively unavoidable even while they are discursively silenced.

In the Q&A following the panelists’ talks, Khor provides their own challenge to the normatively positive re-framings explored above. They speak the often unstated yet frequently experienced observation that care is not always a positive experience for various people involved. Responding to Loree Erickson’s discussion of their experiences of care as being intimately tied to friendship and fun, they state: “I’m not as nice as Loree, at all, and when I’m in

a lot of pain which is when I need care, I'm particularly not, like, a happy, bubbly, 'tell me about your day' kind of person" (Erickson et al., 2014). In terms of organizing active care on a sustainable basis, they note that not being nice, not exuding happiness or asking about someone's day, complicates access to care (Erickson et al., 2014). Without denying that experiences of care might, in fact, be fun at times, Khor speaks experiences of care that are often silenced within politicized discourses of interdependence. Moments of pain aren't easy to mobilize around. They are neither exciting nor inspiring. They point to aspects of care that are both disturbing and banal. They are likely to raise affective experiences of disgust, boredom, pain, and/or a deeply felt desire to run for the hills.

Manalansan IV (2010) notes the ways in which "disgust and dirt are important aspects of care work," going on to characterize them as part a broader affective experience he refers to as "disaffection." Manalansan IV (2010), discussing the "precarious lives" of Filipino care workers, outlines alternate ways of doing care work that prove disruptive in the racialized affective economies he looks at. Disaffection, as a corporeal practice, disrupts dominant racialized, gendered, and spatialized economies of care and domesticity (Manalansan IV, 2010).

By deploying the idea of disaffection, I hope to conjure a more vibrant notion of domesticity—not one resplendent in its hetero-normative structurations, but rather, one that is fraught with the intrusions and intersections of contradictory non-maternal feelings, interests, and desires that emerge out of the banal repetitive routines of domestic labor. (Manalansan IV, 2010, p. 218)

For the workers Manalansan IV (2010) identifies, disaffection is "not a screen or a veil but rather a dwelling space" (p. 222). The negative affects he notes are responsive to disgust, dirt, banality,

and precarious employment structures, and as such, they serve as a shifting, unstable platform from which to rethink economies of debility and the bodies that circulate within them.

The notion of “disaffection” in relation to racialized care workers reflects challenges made to white feminism’s conceptualizations of care and domesticity and the elisions within such work. Davis (1981) notes the ways in which women of colour, black women specifically, were and are overrepresented in the paid domestic labour force. She sees this as part of an enduring legacy of slavery. The relegation of women of colour—now largely migrant labourers—to the fields of care and domestic labour and the disgust and dirt inherent in such labour is obscured in most discussions of the importance of participating in care work within disability justice communities. These elisions parallel, in many ways, exclusions endemic to white feminist theory and activism. A common assumption within calls for the reformulation of care work as movement work is that members of disability justice communities are not *already* engaged in care work. Furthermore, an implicit contention made in many feminist and disability justice oriented theory and activism is that participation in certain forms of care work—ones that reflect and contribute to the continued oppression and marginalization of racialized, gendered, classed people, often with precarious citizenship status—will ultimately lead to revolution for all. If this argument sounds familiar, it’s because it is. Davis (1981) and many other feminists of colour have taken white feminism to task for failing to address the experiences and needs of black women. In the context of disability theory and activism, centring the aforementioned critiques involves the active de-romanticization of care work within much disability theory and activism. Continuing to engage with crip bodies means approaching care work as warranting a more nuanced address, one that seriously engages with the messiness of care.

Bodies, plural

The kind of messiness that care work entails relates directly to bodies in need (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015). Just as need is fundamental to corporeal experience, so are the messy, icky, unpleasant aspects of it. Engaging with the inevitabilities of need and messiness means thinking through encounters between bodies and their environments. No body lives in a vacuum.

Erickson takes up the notion of care as a corporeal relation between bodies in the “Organizing Disability Justice” panel. Noting the ways in which intimate encounters are fundamental to care practices, she points to a disconnect between a particular perception of a body within a caring relationship and the seemingly obvious assertion that said body is not the only one there. She writes:

I think shared vulnerability to me was really recognizing that yeah, while my body has the person who’s, like, going to the bathroom, seems to be, like, the body that’s, like, on display and the body that’s vulnerable, the body that’s, like, receiving care or receiving support, but really, there are two bodies there. (Erickson et al., 2014)

There is a body who is cared for and an individual, in the classic Enlightenment sense, who cares. The former is reduced to a purely corporeal state while the latter is conceptually, if not materially, freed of it. The binary construction of independence/dependence can be clearly located within this dynamic and, despite initial skepticisms, so can interdependence. Though interdependence involves a fluctuation of who is cared for (a body) and who cares (an individual), the two subject positions remain intact, pointing to serious limitations in its mobilization.

Approaching care as a form of affect proposes meaningful alternatives. Care, at its most radical and disruptive, is an affective encounter or event. It is never only an emotional state or

easily identifiable set of practices. It runs uncomfortably through and around the two. Affects are messy, visceral, unpredictable, and impossible to articulate sensations that produce a certain kind of force or intensity translated into emotion and/or practice. They are the disgust, dirt, and disaffection previously explored. They circumvent conventional logics, linguistic or otherwise. When thinking through “care”—the way it is conceived of and mobilized—looking at affects has the potential to articulate an approach to the corporeal intimacy, vulnerability, and relationality that is, at once, central to and disruptive of neoliberal conceptions and enactments of care. Attention to affect does not require divisions between this body and that body. Rather, it draws attention to the ways in which bodies come to be only by way of encounters with other bodies and the flows and intensities that emerge from them. Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Manning (2010) writes:

The body is more than human, more than the actual life of the present-passing. It is the verging-with of life in the making where the actual and the virtual form a tight circuit and life itself opens onto its outside, onto the force of *a life* which courses through it.

(Manning, 2010, p. 118)

The body that opens onto the outside, where the outside may be considered stimuli, absorbed through the act of sensing and feeling, is a productive body, but not in the sense of capitalist productivity, where workforce and national participation is foregrounded. Rather, it is productive in that it proliferates affects and opportunities for affective, emotional, and political resistance. It is the kind of individuation that does not centre neoliberal concepts of the individual. It is “not a linear process;” rather, “it in-forms in quantum leaps that jump from the metastable to the stable, proposing itself not as a system but as a problematic” (Manning, 2010, p. 118).

Care that meaningfully engages with bodies in need is never a singular occurrence. It is multi-dimensional and durational. At its most basic, care for another body always consists of multiple moments. Caring for someone with multiple sclerosis, for example, involves assistance with a variety of symptoms occurring at largely unpredictable intervals. Even if another body is only physically present for one flare up, that body necessarily engages with specific histories and futures of the person experiencing a flare up. There is no self-evident trajectory or linear relationship between flare ups, but they remain connected through the body from which they emanate. No event occurs in a vacuum, nor is any event identical to the previous or next. They are interconnected and irreducible. Care as an infinite series of moments, connected through process rather than predetermination, can also be read in the latter part of Khor's contribution to "Organizing Disability Justice" (Erickson et. al, 2014). Here, we see a series of caring events taking shape through different mediums, contexts, and times, while remaining inextricably related.

Khor talks about a burlesque performance they did which was, to a degree, collaboratively produced (they assert that all of their work is), (Erickson et al., 2014). This work is translated into an artist's statement of sorts and placed within the context of an explicitly politicized panel on disability justice communities. It is then translated from oral to written form by me, who further acts upon the narrative through the process of editing and analyzing. Within this process, we see bodies interacting in what might be seen as caring ways. A group of bodies including Khor collaborates to produce a narrative. Khor presents this narrative to a burlesque audience, one no doubt steeped in playfulness, laughter, and a casual environment that facilitates a degree of audience response and interaction (Erickson et al., 2014). Khor then re-performs this piece in a panel discussion constituting a very different context, including someone who

translates that performance into audio format. I, having missed a number of events I would have liked to have attended for health reasons and experiencing the isolation that accompanies those periods for me and many other PwDs, find said audio on the internet. I listen, I am impacted, I reflect on the panel, I reflect on it again (and again and again), and I am affected as a second hand participant whose disability allows for nothing else. I connect as an activist, participating in a politicized community to which I am not physically proximate. I connect as an academic, producing an affectively mediated representation. Lengthy, uneven, and largely unpredictable processes of dissemination bring it to this page and to its reader. Throughout this potentially endless series of encounters between bodies, various moments of care occur. Acts of “consciousness-raising” à la second wave feminism, as referenced by Khor, become a kind of group and self care (Erickson et al., 2014). Catharsis through performance enters on multiple levels. Solidarity building in an activist event and activist outreach to isolated PwDs constitutes other valued forms of care. All of these interconnected moments, events, and encounters elucidate what a different, more responsive conceptualization of care might look like.

The problematic of the crip body resists singularity and, in doing so, resists the idea that rights for the individual have any kind of transformative potential. Rather, they are socially and politically manufactured concepts, intelligible only within untenable discursive frameworks. Without individuals, there is no self-evident caring relationship. Therefore, independence, dependence, and/or interdependence, as concepts and/or practices, are largely irrelevant. This irrelevance produces a gap of sorts: a profound negativity or absence. Rather than attempt to fill this gap via a desperate resurrection of different articulations of care, or engage in a naïve reclamation of interdependence, we might reconsider what a queer, crip address to the body in need might be.

Generative degeneracy

Care can, and frequently does, disrupt the neoliberal logics within which it circulates. Its practice always exceeds the bounds of capitalism, for “the neoliberal logic of choice and commodification . . . requires predictability that the corporeal circumstances of care cannot live up to” (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015, p. 85). Care, as an affective relation between bodies, is necessarily unpredictable, always shifting, always exhibiting corporeal movement, even when performing stillness. The bodies that populate neoliberalism, in all of their unavoidably shifting, messy, unruly manifestations, are never fully contained. Rather, there are always ruptures, however “minuscule” (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015, p. 86). These ruptures are infinitely meaningful. Ndopu’s contribution to the “Organizing Disability Justice,” panel presents generative temporal ruptures (Erickson et al., 2014). His piece moves from an examination of bodies in relation to labour to bodies in relation to time, understanding the two to be intimately connected. Diverging from Khor’s promise of compassion, Ndopu provides a very different understanding of the future and time: one that turns away from happiness and its attendant emotions (Ahmed, 2010a, 2010b), orienting itself toward pain, disgust, and even death (Erickson et al., 2014).

Ndopu speaks from the position of having a “degenerative body,” asking “what does it mean, cultivating an intimate relationship with my body, and with that process of degenerating, which is a painful and difficult conversation” (Erickson et al., 2014). Ndopu goes on to read excerpts from a previously published piece titled “Degeneracy Now!: Suspended between the violence of time and the timelessness of violence” (Ndopu, 2013). In this article, he provides a case study from his own life to illustrate some of the ways in which the violence of time is

affectively experienced, describing an incident in which an attendant, depended upon to provide urgent medical care, fails to arrive to roll him in the night and prevent pressure sores from forming on his body. He writes:

It is precisely in those moments that I become conscious of my body as a measure of time. With every half hour that passes following the time at which I was meant to be rolled, the parts of my body sunken into the mattress begin to ache and the pain begins to slowly reverberate through my bones. Not only does this prevent me from falling asleep again, it also jolts me into a dreamlike state. As time lapses, I find myself hallucinating to the point where I falsely envision the attendant on duty serendipitously barging through my bedroom door, “saving” me from the perils of a body precariously congealed to temporality. (Ndopu, 2013)

Socially intelligible care, here, is explored only peripherally as absence. Rather than focus on the building of relationships between two subjects, as is the case throughout the bulk of the panel (Erickson et al., 2014), Ndopu’s (2013) body is at the centre of this telling, a body that figures as a series of relationships between time and affect, that lives in pain melting into “dreamlike” states; a body whose “saving” can only occur within a dream. Even when the anonymous attendant comes to roll Ndopu in his bed, his body does not, cannot, be anything but “precariously congealed to temporality” (Ndopu, 2013). To associate care (here, having one’s basic needs met by another body) with material absence and impossible fantasy forces a different way of thinking about relationships. A gap is exposed between intellectually and emotionally loaded understandings of what constitutes care and affective experiences of relationality that exceed two (or three, or four, etc.) human subjects. What begins to emerge, here, is the sense that care is not merely a relation between human bodies. Rather, care (or its absence) might describe

a relation between a body and its fantasies, a bed and the bones that sink into it, and/or time and flesh.

Understanding care as a corporeal relation requires an extension of the meaning of the corporeal and a reckoning with the processual and multidimensional. Ndopu's (2013) narrative illustrates the kind of multiple and shifting relationships care entails. Rather than consisting of an encounter between human bodies in relative isolation, we might consider the ways in which care, like any affective interaction, is simultaneously a form of consumption and exchange. This does not necessarily occur in capitalist terms, though it often does, but also as material processes that do not distinguish between human bodies and their environment. Care would be corporeal, then, only if there is a radical reconceptualization of what constitutes a body/bodies, as well as an unseating of artificial boundaries between bodies and their outsides/insides. Chen (2011) writes: "[s]tanding before you, I ingest you. There is nothing fanciful about this. I am ingesting your exhaled air, your sloughed skin, and the skin of the tables, chairs, and carpet in this room" (p. 280). To name these processes is to point to the ways in which care is part of a larger structure of corporeal movements and material processes.

Going on to discuss racialized understandings of toxicity and bodily permeability, Chen (2011) notes the ways in which, though material permeability may be universal, some bodies are discursively positioned as more or less open to the outside. Additionally, what exactly constitutes the outside is differentially produced. While white children are being protected from environmental (and social) toxicity, "black children are already assumed to be toxic" (Chen, 2011, p. 270). Chen approaches the notion of toxicity with nuance. They write:

toxins, or poisons, have a rich and mixed history; they are curative, as in vaccines; they are injurious to the "health" desiring or health-exemplifying individual; they are

biopolitically brought to bear on certain populations considered constitutionally deserving of them. (Chen, 2015, p. 28)

Toxicity, for Chen, is multifaceted. It is neither good, nor bad, nor neutral. For Chen (2015), to assume perpetual intoxication is “to reject clear divisions between body and mind; and to forego the tempting categorization of purity for subjects deemed ‘healthful’ or exempt from the classification of severity” (p. 28). To see toxicity this way means embracing bodily permeability and disturbing the notion of a self contained body altogether and, in doing so, disrupting racializing, colonial discourses dependent on compulsory able-bodiedness.

Chen’s (2011; 2015) work on toxicity speaks to Ahuja’s (2015) work on atmospheric intimacy. Ahuja (2015) also highlights the permeability of bodies, exploring the social anxieties surrounding contamination. For Chen (2011), these fears relate to toxins, chemicals, and poisons. For Ahuja (2015), the figural contamination of whiteness is explored through the construction of a racialized parasite. Parasitism, like toxicity, raises important questions. He writes:

beyond its invocation of xenophobic rhetorics of shape-shifting, virality, and contagion, the parasite suggests a problem of knowledge about agency and causality. For this is a human defined by waste rather than by romantic marks of sentience, feeling, or intentionality. (Ahuja, 2015, p. 372)

Care as an affective encounter similarly challenges notions of choice, agency, and emotion. It embraces disgust, decay, and death, rejecting romanticizing discourses of care. The toxic cripple raising the threat of contamination: the cripple parasite that consumes and consumes while producing nothing and the dying degenerative body, living in a state of constant almost-extinction: these are the refuse of neoliberal economies. The question is: what will happen if the garbage cannot be swept away?

Collisions

Finkelstein's (2003), "The Only Thing you Have to do is Live," a relatively short piece spanning genres such as life writing, erotica, academic writing, and manifesto, begins with an account of the author fisting a femme top's ass. Using language and concepts drawn from queer activism, disability justice movements, and S/M communities, Finkelstein traverses artificial bounds between pain and pleasure. Though these connections are by no means groundbreaking, their placement within Finkelstein's (2003) text produces creative insights that point toward the radical potential found in the violent collision between bodies, collisions that result in a multitude of ambivalent sensations. Finkelstein (2003) writes:

I have never been so intent on serving someone as I am at this moment. My arm is at an angle that my neck, with three bone spurs going into my vertebrae, does not like. My body starts to shake. This is a pain that nags and builds. (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 308)

Her desire to service her lover intimately relates to her body's pain. The two are inseparable. At other points in this piece, Finkelstein (2003) binds her butchness to the moments where she fucks "despite the pain," the pain "that I will not let steal from me this most basic piece of my queerness" (p. 316). These moments speak to the dominant narrative that systematically devalues experiences of pain and suffering. They speak more to a collective narrative than the marginalized affective encounters I speak to here, but the omnipresence of such events further highlights their normative function.

What is more interesting in Finkelstein's (2003) text are the moments where she meaningfully engages with her pain, not as an inconvenience or obstacle, but as a series of

sensations that are meaningful in and of themselves. Finkelstein (2003) outlines a certain approach to pain:

Sitting with it, breathing through it, not dramatically (as I once did at the end of whips) but quietly: noticing the tear running down my face, tasting the salt, letting it dry, letting it go. Noticing the burn in my legs—being afraid, bringing myself back—just being with it, observing it. Breathing in the energy from the earth, being in the moment, just feeling the heat of her pulsing canal. (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 318)

Finkelstein's (2003) proposal to sit in pain and feel the vulnerability and permeability of her body—its openness to pain, tastes, air, energy, and heat—constitutes a renunciation of the normative qualifiers that precede and follow this passage. Furthermore, it is an everyday renunciation, not reliant on the drama she references (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 318).

Finkelstein (2003) approaches the ass of her lover as a source of pain and heat. The act of anal fisting induces physical pain. Anal fisting produces both metaphorical heat, as in, it gets her hot, and literal heat, as in, she absorbs the heat of her lover's body through her rectum, producing friction which further heats things up. Anal fisting, in Finkelstein's (2003) text, is a corporeal encounter that both sustains and destroys her cripbutch body. For reasons beyond (but including) the obvious, Bersani's (2010) "Is the Rectum a Grave?" productively accompanies Finkelstein's (2003) "The only thing you have to do is live." Bersani's (2010) radical proposal of a kind of negativity that resists normative productions of pleasure speaks to the disruptive moments in Finkelstein's (2003) text, as well as a broader analysis in which care is thought of a corporeal encounter that generates meaningful politics through the destruction of subjectivity and, relatedly, positiv(ist)e representations of selfhood. "Is the Rectum a Grave?" was originally published in 1987, during the heart of the AIDS crisis and the political debates and struggles that

rose up around it. In a context in which an identity-based politic was aggressively being taken up by many AIDS activists, and importantly so, Bersani's (2010) text acts very differently. "Is the Rectum a Grave?" points to the inherent limits of identity politics, starting with a problematization of the very notion of identity.

Bersani's (1995; 2010) work centres white, gay men—both in his analysis of identity formations and disruptions and his discussion of sex (and sex acts). While Bersani's (1995; 2010) analysis is undoubtedly complicated by these incredibly loaded and meaningful exclusions that must not go unnoticed, it exhibits relevant insights which need not be discounted. Bersani's (2010) analysis begins with an examination of representations of gays during the AIDS crisis in the U.S, noting that the two are presented as inseparable. He notes that these representations have very little to say about HIV/AIDS itself, and much more to say about "heterosexual anxieties" (Bersani, 2010, p. 7). Talking about AIDS (and not HIV) necessarily raises the spectre of the killer gay, while talking about gay men necessarily raises the spectre of killer AIDS. Bersani's (2010) explorations of expendable populations (in this case, white, gay men) and the virulent fear and renunciation of encounters with such bodies complement my readings of Ahuja (2015) and Chen (2011) on toxicity, contagion, and parasitism. Discourses around AIDS in the height of the AIDS crisis constructed gay men as not only a disposable population, but a population in need of disposal. For Bersani (1995; 2010), anal sex performed by gay men can produce a kind of radical destruction of normative masculinity and the notion of discrete selves it relies on, and therein lies its largely unspoken threat. Bersani's (1995; 2010) understanding of sex as destruction aggressively counters the personal, private, and romantic language that has sanitized sex in subsequent years. While assimilationist gay movements abandon radical sexual politics and practices in favour of veiled references to "the bedrooms of the nation," Bersani (1995) argues

that sex, in its various manifestations, is fundamental to U.S. politics. It is inextricably tied up in processes of subject formation and the construction of identitarian regimes. It has the capacity to be just as problematic as the construction of sexuality does, but it also carries with it revolutionary potential not found elsewhere.

Bersani (2010) forms an unlikely (and without a doubt one-sided) alliance with second wave feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon as a means of exploring how gay, male, penetrative sex, the desire for it and the act of doing it, is decidedly not a matter of romance; rather, it is a matter of violence and negation. Bersani's (2010) interest in Dworkin and MacKinnon is bizarrely appropriate, specifically because their equation of sex with violence is useful to his analysis of sex as intimately tied to negation, debasement, and the dissolution of the self. It reveals the ways in which sex is always "anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving" (Bersani, 2010, p. 22). However, while MacKinnon and Dworkin perform these assertions as part of a radical denunciation of penetrative sex, Bersani (2010) takes up their observations differently. What he sees as their redemptive project—that is, the promise of a version of sex that *is* communal, egalitarian, nurturing, and loving—undermines the force of their analysis, much in the same way as arguments for diversity and plurality do. Bersani (2010) asserts that all of these antis and the positions of powerlessness that exist within them are valuable. Just as sex can be regulatory, it can also involve a radical process of self-negation. More specifically, masochism/passivity in sex can be "self-shattering," frustrating the regulatory, normative, and prescriptive functions of a fictional, discrete self to begin with, shattering that internalized idea and catapulting bodies into a violently relational infinitude.

Understanding that bodies relate through sex in ways that are potentially destructive of the self, what might that mean for the formation of different notions of care? For one, the kind of

sentimentality associated with individuals in a caring relationship becomes untenable. Additionally, the notion of two distinct bodies participating in a self-evident relationship ceases to be relevant. Understandings of caring relationships explored in the “Organizing Disability Justice” panel are exposed as in keeping with the assimilationist gay moves towards the de-sexualization of the political Bersani (1995) identifies. These approaches “turn our attention away from the body—from the acts in which it engages, from the pain it inflicts and begs for—and directs out attention to the romances of memory” (Bersani, 2010, p. 27). The body in need, called upon to ground caring relationships, is immediately contained and sanitized. It is a body to act upon rather than a body that acts, for even when it is placed within a framework of “interdependence,” the pain that permeates and emanates is elided so as to attain the “romances of memory” Bersani (2010) describes (p. 27).

Moments of the kind of self-immolation Bersani (1995; 2010) describes pepper Finkelstein’s (2003) “The Only Thing you Have to do is Live.” Describing a build-up to orgasm during the anal fisting session she narrates, Finkelstein (2003) writes, “In those minutes my whole world is her asshole and her screams and our smells” (p. 309). She continues, “we are just moving together in a song of lust and love and service, and she comes again as I rotate my fist in a semicircle insider her. When she finishes, we both lie there while I have tears in my eyes from pain” (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 309). The pain Bersani (2010) identifies in masochistic sex acts extends, here, emerging not only in the violent encounter between bodies that their sex constitutes, but durationally in the experiences of a cripp body that lives in pain—a body whose submission is multi-dimensional and a pain that, when voiced, “is just fucking getting in my way” (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 309). Finkelstein (2003) states that she experiences this pain as an inconvenience, an experience of “deep despair” at being “let down by [her] body” (p. 310),

and/or as a form of cripbutch-ness she values. However, none of these responses aptly communicate the kind of pain that accompanies the ecstatic experience of her world in a rectum. In those moments where she “swear[s she] could go in up to [her] shoulder” (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 309), the integrity of her body is shattered and the corporeal relation that remains is an affective absorption of flesh.

Understanding care as a potentially endless series of affective collisions allows for an understanding of care that does not assume harmony, similarity, parallels, or stasis. It points to the ways in which bodies need not have anything common other than the moments at which they meet. It highlights that no body, disabled, cripp, or otherwise, is impenetrable. Need motivates without defining, for need is just as mobile and shifting as the molecules that make up bodies and environments. Care, here, explodes boundaries between selves, crashing them into one another, twisting bodies together and forming new combinations in the process, only to remake them elsewhere through a never-ending series of collisions. Care, then, is responsive and relevant to each body in that there is no one-size-fits-all framework for understanding what care, with each of its meanings undone, feels like. Care, with its form undone, can finally accommodate a need that is ever present and amorphous.

Chapter 3: Crip encounters of a queer kind

This chapter further explores forms of relationality that challenge bounded subjectivities. It centres chemical encounters, melancholic love-objects, and dead flesh, mobilizing, throughout, an analysis that highlights forms of experimentation with infinitely mobile subjectivities. I begin by examining the ways in which assemblage theory has been taken up by different theorists of cripness, queerness, and processes of racialization (Puar, 2012; Weheliye, 2014; Brown, 2015), challenging prior emphases on intersectional analysis in a great deal of anti-oppression scholarship and activism. I look at how various processes of becoming emerge throughout socio-spatial proximities. The proximities explored are always lively, but rarely “alive,” in conventional terms. I read Hartman’s (2007) book, *Lose your mother*, looking for the moments in her text where loss, dispossession, dirt, and death emerge as formative encounters. Alongside Hartman’s (2007) text, I engage with three works by Clare (1999, 2001, 2003) and a portion of Fanon’s (1967) *Black skin, white masks* as further examples of destructive summonings that exhibit potential for more generative analyses. Calling upon Chen (2011; 2012; 2015), I look at the ways in which chemical bonds figure into Hartman’s (2007) text. I also draw from Kim’s (2015) work on “unbecoming human,” to explore how Clare (1999) and Hartman (2007) engage with the possibilities in becoming object. I end with a brief consideration of Preciado’s (2013) *Testo Junkie* and the queer forms of experimentation with corporeality and bio-coding it elucidates. Throughout my exploration of different affective bonds, I draw from multiple genres of theory and life writing. I facilitate and mobilize analytic proximities, putting sometimes disparate texts into conversation with one another, and in so doing, imagining what a radical form of relationality not dependent on conventional notions of kinship and human relationships might look like.

The notion of crip-ness can be extended to think the “many ways oppression and social injustice can mark a body” (Clare, 2001, p. 362). Clare (2001) encourages us to think non-normative bodies relationally, pointing to the ways in which crip-ness is always corporeal and never one-dimensional. Clare (2001) understands oppression as a series of corporeal events and encounters:

I think of the kid tracked into “special education” because of his speech impediment, which is actually a common sign of sexual abuse. I think of the autoimmune diseases, the cancers, the various kinds of chemical sensitivities that flag what it means to live in a world full of toxins. I think of the folks who live with work-related disabilities because of exploitative, dangerous work conditions. I think of the people who live downwind of nuclear fallout, the people who die for lack of access to health care, the rape survivors who struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. The list goes on and on. (Clare, 2001, p. 362-363)

The people Clare (2001) thinks of traverse clearly marked differences in and among human bodies, exposing the ways in which environments—social, spatial, chemical, economic, etc.—facilitate debility in so many ways, resulting in a landscape of affects that defy bounded notions of subjectivity and identity. Additionally, Clare’s (2001) relational analysis points to the ways in which crip-ness and racialization are intimately connected. Racialized encounters with toxicity (Chen, 2011; 2015), and the kind of parasitic encounters Ahuja (2015) references, demonstrate that understandings of bodily debility and permeability are fundamentally relational, not just in terms of human bodies interacting with other human bodies, but also with respect to how different notions human-ness and its negation are tied up in processes of colonialism, imperialism, classism, and racism.

Disability and racism have, historically, collided and colluded, often working in tandem. The production of disposable bodies relies on racist *and* ableist logics, where the two frequently converge. Chen (2015) writes: “disability resides in the description of races, and may well reside in the defining theme of race as a colonial trope of incapacity” (p. 27). Race and disability, here, are coinciding, if not coextensive, somatic technologies, relying on similar and sometimes the same state-based, biomedical, and necropolitical projects. As one example, eugenic practices have been and continue to be played out on crip bodies, and those practices evolved alongside the enactment of scientific racism as formulated during periods of imperial and colonial expansion. Disability and race, here, are more than intersectional, though they are sometimes that as well. They coexist in and among shifting and porous bodies. Puar (2012) points to the limitations of intersectional analyses as a model that produces subjectivities as points on a grid and relations between them as intersections of discrete identities. Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Massumi, Puar (2012) writes:

Subject positioning on a grid is never self-coinciding; positioning does not precede movement but rather is induced by it; epistemological correctives cannot apprehend ontological becomings; the complexity of process is continually mistaken for a resultant product. (Puar, 2012, p. 50)

Puar (2012) proposes assemblage theory as more responsive to the unstable, mobile, and porous bodies that populate environments. Assemblage theory is a challenge to intersectional identity politics, but it does not neutralize difference in the process. Rather, “Categories—race, gender, sexuality—are considered events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects” (Puar, 2012, p. 58).

While mobilizations of race and disability as intersecting subjectivities are not without their utility, they are more productively understood not as states, but as durational engagements. A relevant example includes the emerging tendency within much disability theory and politics to understand disability as a universal human condition. This move to complicate and destabilize binaries between able-bodiedness and disability speaks to a political imperative to promote processes of identification between and among bodies and thus challenge hierarchies of embodiment. These critiques enlarge the scope of an easily identifiable disabled subjectivity, but leave its boundaries and exclusions by and large intact. Puar's (2012) mobilization of assemblage theory leaves space for the more complex experiences of affect and embodiment that permeate bodies and environments. It is better suited to address the complex relations whereby some bodies come to be aligned with debility and others are oriented towards ability.

Weheliye (2014) also takes up assemblage theory; more specifically, he takes the enactment of racializing assemblages as a point of analytic departure. Racializing assemblages, in keeping with Puar's (2012) project, take up process oriented analyses and complex relational dynamics to understand race and racialization as durational, unstable, and shifting points of encounter between bodies. Racializing assemblages approach "race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 4). Weheliye (2014) argues for thinking beyond approaches to studying race and racialization through models of specificity and/or comparison, noting that such frameworks uphold notions of the human as Man (white, able-bodied, heteronormative, etc.) and, in the process, maintain its corporeally loaded contrast to deviant others. He puts forward the concept of a thoroughly en fleshed body not bounded in its abjection, but rather, as "animat[ing] the elsewhere of Man" and deconstructing the artificial

conflation of political violence with flesh, creating space for the movement of “flesh into a potentiality in any and all things, an originating leap in the imagining of future anterior freedoms and new genres of humanity” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 137).

While Weheliye’s (2014) text does not explicitly engage disabled bodies (apart from two casual references), its methods and mobilizations of affect and flesh necessarily reference crip bodies as they are understood here. His understanding of the production of the human, or Man, as requiring whiteness, heterosexuality, and other relations of privilege could, and indeed must, also reference able-bodiedness. Though not explicitly, the intended scope of his analysis takes up Puar’s (2009) notions of debility and capacity. His analysis centres black feminism, though not according to comparative logics (racism is like ableism is like fill-in-the-black) and/or notions of specificity (black feminism is just about race). Rather, he puts forward a meaningful analysis that extends beyond both formulations. He writes,

If we are to affect significant systemic challenges, then we must locate at least some of the struggles for justice in the region of humanity as a relational ontological totality (an object of knowledge) that cannot be reduced to either the universal or particular.

(Weheliye, 2014, p. 135)

That is, no expression of humanity and/or the human is the same, but neither are they conveniently separate. To challenge the intelligibility of humanity is not to say that various forms of violence, negation, and/or death that result from such a stance are experienced evenly. To say that suffering is endemic to being human is to elide meaningful differences in how and to what degree those forms of violence are experienced. What is put forward, here, is not sameness or an irresponsibly broad conceptualization of “shared experience.” It is a form of radical

relationality that explores flesh as subject to the workings of various social, political, and economic institutions and discourses that form both immediate and distant encounters.

Object bonds

Hartman's (2007) *Lose your mother* exhibits moments of these radical forms of relationality.

This text does not constitute a disability memoir or narrative in any conventional sense.

However, and in part because of this, it is my argument that *Lose Your Mother* is a crip narrative, where crip is understood as assemblage rather than identity. In this text, Hartman (2007) delves into moments of affective trauma emerging throughout her research into the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In the process, she highlights the forms of relationality Weheliye (2014) references, exemplifying moments of the kind of specificity he critiques as well as the ways in which engagements with the flesh can articulate generative forms of loss. *Lose Your Mother* is travel writing, memoir, historical exploration, creative non-fiction, and academic text. It chronicles Hartman's (2007) research trips through various parts of Africa and the Caribbean as she puts together a fractured narrative of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its legacies. Most importantly, here, she writes of affective interactions with the spatial, temporal, and corporeal knowledges she comes across. Hartman's (2007) engagements point to the ways in which ableism and racism intersect in the production of disposable populations and the ways in which black bodies of the past, present, and future are intimately tied to disabled bodies in that both are denied the kind of human subjectivity associated with white, able-bodied men in often overlapping ways. They exist outside the production of subjects as something other than human.

Lose Your Mother (2007) begins with an encounter that can be productively read alongside Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks*. It parallels what Fanon (1967) explores in

the chapter, “The Fact of Blackness” (Fanon, 1967), looking at the ways in which different processes of naming can function as a form of abjection and negation, not just positiv(ist)e formulations of identity. Fanon (1967) powerfully describes the corporeal experience of being named a negro, a naming which escalates, producing layers of affect within the body of the white child who names him, within his own named body and, most significantly, between their seemingly distinct bodies. Each time he is named, his affects collide and mutate, culminating in a multitude of responses. He “demands an explanation”—nothing of satisfaction comes (Fanon, 1967, p. 109). He makes “a tight smile,” “[making] up [his] mind to laugh [himself] to tears,” but the laughter doesn’t come (Fanon, 1967, p. 111). He shivers from the cold, “that cold that goes through your bones” (Fanon, 1967, p. 114). He feels “Shame and self-contempt. Nausea” (Fanon, 1967, p. 116). This is a constitutive encounter with a form of embodiment aligned with the not white, and therefore, the not human. It is an encounter between emotions and intellectual responses, as well as between an environmental temperature (cold) and his bones. Fanon (1967) is a negro insofar as he is a screen on which the racializing fictions of colonialism play out, engaging with his flesh by rendering it uninhabitable.

The traumatic experience of naming that Fanon describes emerges within Hartman’s (2007) text in very different and eerily similar ways. Hartman (2007), looking for the kind spatial-somatic home in Ghana that she longs for, is instantly denied that possibility. She writes, “As I disembarked from the bus in Elmina, I heard it. It was sharp and clear, as it rang in the air, and clattered in my ear making me recoil. *Obruni*. A stranger. A foreigner from across the sea” (Hartman, 2007, p. 3). Not insignificantly, this kind of corporeal “summoning” (Hartman, 2007, p. 3), also springs from the mouths of children: the children that, to revisit Edelman (2004) briefly, are the future. The familiarity and sense of belonging Hartman yearns for is instantly

crushed. In place of familial identification, there is a kind of affective death whereby Hartman (2007), like Fanon (1967), is confronted with “a historico-racial schema” (Fanon, 1967, p. 111) that effects an alienated embodiment. The relationality that emerges is more murderous than loving. “My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning on that white winter day” (Fanon, 1967, p. 113). Hartman (2007) is an *obruni*, neither Ghanaian nor American. She is nowhere at home, both spatially and somatically.

Clare (2003) highlights the ways in which encounters with disability and gender deviance can produce experiences of affective alienation. Clare (2003) makes explicit the continual aspects of such encounters, emphasizing fluid relations between the visual and linguistic. He writes:

Gawking, gaping, staring: I can’t say when it first happened. When first a pair of eyes caught me, held me in their vise grip, tore skin from muscle, muscle from bone. Those eyes always shouted, “Freak, retard, cripple,” demanding an answer for trembling hands, a tomboy’s bold and unsteady gait I never grew out of. It started young, anywhere I encountered humans. Gawking, gaping, staring seeped into my bones, became the marrow. (Clare, 2003, p. 257)

While Clare (2003), like Fanon (1967), absorbs the pain of failed identification into their bones, feeling it mutate their body, Hartman’s (2007) narrative locates her outsider status somewhere between her skin and her environs. Her distance from those who name her appears in the form of a raincoat. She experiences her raincoat as a visible signifier of strangeness, for “who else sported vinyl in the tropics?” (Hartman, 2007, p. 3). Reading these encounters alongside each other, the somatic bonds between bone and raincoat become abundantly clear.

After her initial encounter with the children who name her *obruni* (Hartman, 2007, p. 3), Hartman describes another stranger, or rather, one to whom she is strange. Hartman (2007) writes:

I doubted he had ever wasted an afternoon daydreaming about my arrival, whereas I had dreamed of living in Ghana since I was in college. I imagined a world less racist than the one from which I came. I had longed for a country in which my inheritance would amount to more than dispossession and in which I would no longer feel like a problem. (Hartman, 2007, p. 56-57)

This longing for inheritance speaks to a longing for a form of kinship: a pre-existent, self-evident relationality that her vinyl clad body resists. The raincoat she references speaks both to a refusal of kinship and to the potential for unfamiliar relations in the form of chemical and environmental encounters with the spaces and bodies Hartman (2007) longs to absorb and become. Between her and her negated inheritance is a toxic technology.

A synthetic combination of ethylene and chlorine, vinyl's uses often relate to its superficial impermeability. It not only forms waterproof barriers in the form of rain gear, but is also often used as inexpensive flooring and siding, plumbing that transports chemically loaded water and human refuse, and a substance with which to line landfills. All of these examples mirror the kind of barrier Hartman senses between herself and those around her. Vinyl, here, is a somatic technology: a gendered, racialized assemblage. It is a marker of corporeal irreconcilability and ironic detachments. However, vinyl might also come to signal a more prescient bond than that of kinship or nationality.

The most common and pervasive form of vinyl currently manufactured is Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC). Production processes have been linked to various corporeal effects in workers,

such as multiple forms of cancer, reproductive health issues, neurological changes, and more (DeMatteo et al, 2012; U.S. Green Building Council, 2004). These effects, first explored in earnest in the 1970s, persist and workers continue to experience various forms of chemical exposure and unsafe working conditions that vary according to context, but present across the board. In Canada and the U.S., women and other precarious populations are overrepresented in the most labour intensive, risk-associated areas of the industry (DeMatteo et al., 2012). Racialized people, poor people, people with disabilities (either pre-existing or emerging during the period of employment), and other marginalized populations are overwhelmingly overrepresented in these sectors of embodied precarity.

Globally, these dynamics emerge on an exponentially more disparate scale, as factory outsourcing to the global south allows for workplace safety practices and regulations that are significantly more lax, and economic, social, and corporeal precarity are realities for even larger populations. While shifts in context and degree are indisputable, a chemical bond is formed between, for example, racialized populations in North America and Europe and those in third world countries through mutual exposure and chemical transit across borders. That bond becomes even more diffuse and pervasive when toxic byproducts associated with plastics production and consumption enter air, soil, and water, exposing entire communities, especially those located in the immediate vicinity of PVC facilities (U.S. Green Building Council, 2004). The distribution of toxicity is a hugely uneven process whereby marginalized communities experience the environmental effects of plastics manufacturing disproportionately. Toxic facilities are more likely to be built near spaces and bodies that experience the same or similar forms of precarity associated with the workers within these plants. These proximities facilitate forms of environmental exposure that demonstrate direct correlations between class, gender,

race, colonialism, etc. and the production of chemically induced debility. These trends have been identified by various environmental justice movements mobilizing against global power asymmetries related to the uneven distribution of toxicity and environmental degradation. Chen (2011) draws from these insights.

These are those who find themselves on the underside of industrial “development”—women hand-painting vaporous toys by the hundreds daily without protection; agricultural workers with little access to healthcare picking fruit in a cloud of pesticides, methane, and fertilizer that is breathable only in a strictly mechanical sense; people living adjacent to pollution-spewing factories or downwind of a refinery installed by a distant neocolonial metropolis, or in the abjected periphery of a gentrified urban “centre”; those living in walls fortified with lead that peel inward in a false embrace; domestic workers laboring in toxic conditions, taking into their bodies what their better-vested employers can then avoid. (Chen, 2011, p. 276)

Puar (2009) also takes up these observations, pointing to the ways in which privileged consumers in a global neoliberal economy are presumed to deserve and demand health, understood in part as the absence of toxicity, while “other bodies are involved in the production processes precisely because they are deemed available for injury—they are, in other words, expendable, bodies whose debilitation is required in order to sustain capitalist narratives of progress” (Puar, 2009, p. 168).

Hartman’s (2007) raincoat is a socially, economically, politically, and corporeally loaded bond, evidencing the ways in which chemicals and particles facilitate affective encounters between bodies, some of whom are considered non-toxic or, at least, not deserving of toxic exposure, and others who are considered already contaminated and necessarily so (Chen, 2011).

Her *obruni* status, rather than signaling a refused connection, is riddled with points of encounter. Though her stated longing for kinship may be unrequited, another politicized spatial and physical encounter takes place.

It is important to note, however, that while global circulations of toxicity are unevenly experienced, they are also infinitely present. PVC elicits points of encounter that engage all bodies. Capacity and debility are not discrete states of being in relation to toxic encounters. The circulation of toxic technologies such as PVC points to the ways in which they function not only as inert substances distributed through space and time, but also as somatic pathways, transferring and translating bodies during temporal, spatial, and economic travels. Additionally, the temporality of PVC juxtaposes degeneration and longevity, embodying consumer capitalism's dependence on planned obsolescence at the same time as PVC exhibits a lengthy life course as it behaves within a global somatic economy. Planned obsolescence aligns vinyl with death, while its persistence as waste refuses it. PVC fills the same landfills that it lines. In these ways, vinyl labors under the sign of death at the same time as it is meant to facilitate human life through its uses and functions. The irony of this relation is managed through a global distribution of waste that further emphasizes the expendability of marginalized bodies. Discarded vinyl is human excrement: that which must be disavowed and distanced from "healthy" bodies. The life course of vinyl mediates relations between bodies and environments, positioning bodies along the uneven and mobile trajectories it facilitates.

The infinitely permeable non-barrier of vinyl is also architecturally significant, producing further points of connection. The common use of vinyl in the production of inexpensive flooring serves as one of many supposedly impermeable layers between bodies and the ground under the spaces they inhabit. Vinyl, despite its resistance to deterioration, has a relatively short productive

lifespan. It becomes dry, cracked, worn, damaged, and peels away revealing layers of dirt and grime that cling to the aging adhesive underneath. Hartman's (2007) travels from the privileged environs of North American universities to old slave dungeons in Ghana and on the African Atlantic coast mirror these processes of stunted deterioration, but so much more dramatically. Hartman (2007) writes, "the only part of my past that I could put my hands on was the filth from which I recoiled, layers of organic material pressed hard against a stone floor" (p. 115). Hartman (2007) experiences a massive disconnect, here. The rot and decay of black slaves are directly under her feet, against the porous skin of her hands. The impersonal experience of visiting historical monuments is disrupted by the immediate tactility of aging body fluids. Hartman (2007) visits the aforementioned dungeon many times, forming layers of encounter with the same, but always changing floor. With each visit, her feet press into the "filth," depositing particles that came with her and picking up ones that preceded her. With each step, the filth is further compacted; her shoes are worn a little more every time. She and the dungeon affect each other's form. Throughout these corporeal conversations, both mutate and shift. It is not surprising, then, that they also act corporeally. Her descriptions of these visits shift over their duration, oscillating between disaffection, annoyance, and affective outbursts. During one visit, she finds herself alone with the space, rather than amid a sea of anger-inducing tourists. During this visit, she experiences a kind of affective confusion that had previously eluded her.

I knew only how it felt, which was akin to choking. My chest grew congested and my palms started sweating and I got light-headed. My skin became tight and prickly, as if there was too little of it and too much of everything else. The hollow inside my chest expanded. I could feel my torso bulge and distend like a corpse swelling with gasses. And

the emptiness was a huge balloon expanding inside me and pressing against my organs, until I could no longer breathe and was about to explode. (Hartman, 2007, p. 118)

The death, decay, and rot that lives in the dungeon merge with Hartman's body, eliciting an experience in which the boundaries between herself and the historical depths she plumbs cease to hold up. Spatial proximity disables her, denies her breath, and tightens her skin. She is no longer a researcher or a long lost daughter, she is the dead and dying slaves she's looking for, and the only way she knows how to react is to "go back in the sunlight" and "breathe easily," harboring a sensation of loss, for "it was just the husk [of her body] and not really me" (Hartman, 2007, p. 118). Hartman (2007) loses her identity as researcher, academic, tourist, daughter in search of a utopic homeland when she absorbs the bodies of the slaves whose space she encounters by virtue of spatial and affective proximity. She is empty of human subjectivity not because she ceases to exist as dynamic flesh, but rather, because she is full of the nothing that the non-human slave signals.

In Hartman's (2007) encounter with the dungeon and its ethereal occupants, she finds herself "an object in the midst of other objects" (Fanon, 1967, p. 109). The experience of emptiness Hartman (2007) describes speaks to Kim's (2015) notion of "unbecoming human." Kim (2015) posits "that unbecoming human—by embodying objecthood, surrendering agency, and practicing powerlessness—may open up an anti-ableism, antiviolence queer ethics of proximity that reveals the workings of the boundary of the human" (p. 295-296). Unbecoming human, here, is an ethical positioning that yields generative politics in objecthood. Rather than extending access to the human, desperately attempting to fold in bodies already aligned with the nonhuman, Kim (2015) notes that, "Remedying objectification and dehumanization may end up simply prescribing subjectivity and agency in order to rehumanize othered bodies without

questioning why the recognition of humanity relies on certain signs of subjectivity and agency” (p. 298). These versions of human-ness rely on normative understandings of able-bodied productivity. To begin with the passive object is to centre experiences of objecthood and negation experienced by crip bodies who, in their non-capacity, are already something other than human. A politics of proximity, then, speaks to relational dynamics between bodies and environments and presents a point of “entry into the relationship between disabled unproductive, queer, and nonwhite bodies and the ableist society that tempts them with the legitimizing value of normality” (Kim, 2015, p. 301). Hartman (2007) emerges from her journey into the dungeon a “husk,” a passive object (p. 118). Her body unbecomes human, and in the process, she is disabled, but like a husk around a seed she holds something generative that traverses boundaries between life and death and animate and inanimate.

To recuperate experiences of passivity and objecthood through the bodies of slaves is, of course, not a simple exercise. Indeed, it runs the risk of reenacting the objectifying violence regularly unleashed upon racialized and disabled bodies. However, these theoretical and affective projects do not take place in spite of those risks, but rather are necessary to better understand and address violent historical processes. Kim (2015) writes:

Exploring the moments of unbecoming human as a form of power and the reorganization of power relations is not to obscure but to facilitate a deeper understanding of how, in certain contexts, objectifying oneself and others as disposable, replaceable, unworthy of care, and violatable is exploitative and destructive. (Kim, 2015, p. 301)

The objects Kim (2015) sees as constituting generative becomings are multifaceted and mobile. It is in their becomings, rather than their circulation as forms of capital or bounded materiality, that the object-hood Kim (2015) describes achieves generative potential. Passivity, here, does not

mean stasis. It is the infinitely labile movement between and among objects that is meaningful, that has the potential to address complex relations of disposability and objectification that have and continue to violently marginalize various groups. This dynamic and contextually dependent analysis exhibits potential, but more than that, it is necessary in order to outline an ethical position from which to start rethinking subjectivity and the human. It's life and death.

Clare (1999) also explores a process of bonding with objects. He explores the ways his body resists, the ways in which he finds he can't, and the moments where he feels its continuity. Stones emerge throughout Clare's (1999) memoir, *Exile and Pride*. He carries stones from his hometown in Vermont in his pockets. Those stones form relationships between his pocket and the familiar wilderness of Vermont, the softness of his flesh and the hardness he developed in order to cope with pain, and what he holds in his hand and what rattles in his heart. Clare (1999) begins by expressing a desire to "write not about the stones, but the heat itself" (p. 126). He proposes that this involves "asking some hard, risky questions" (Clare, 1999, p. 126). Those difficult questions point to something other than a distinction between stones and heat. Rather than separating out the heat, he writes, "the stone and the heat that warms it," for his "body has never been singular. Disability snarls into gender. Class wraps around race. Sexuality strains against abuse. *This is how to reach beneath the skin*" (Clare, 1999, p. 137). A body positioned against objects poses hard questions, but it also points to the impossibility of the "against" and to the risky possibilities in existing *with* and *as* the stones. Clare's (1999) encounters with the stones provide an example of embodying object-hood: joining with objects not in order to neutralize or absorb them into a human body, but rather, to demonstrate their permeability, mutability, coexistence, and lively coextension.

Skeletal bonds

Spoiler alert: Hartman (2007) never finds her “mother,” or at least not the one she goes in search of. What she does find are proximities, some foreseen, some unpredictable, that propose unexpected connections. Anonymity and objecthood figure prominently in Hartman’s (2007) search for a mother country.

Stranger is the X that stands in for a proper name. It is the placeholder for the missing, the mark of the passage, the scar between native and citizen. It is both an end and a beginning. It announces the disappearance of the known world and the antipathy of the new one. And the longing and the loss redolent in the label were as much my inheritance as they were that of the enslaved. (Hartman, 2007, p. 8)

The “X” here has multiple meanings. An X was commonly used in place of a signature for “freed” slaves who had been aggressively denied opportunities for English literacy. Here, X signals acts of violence that accompanied understandings of slaves as non-humans. Additionally, X carries meaning in arithmetic, algebra, statistics, and science, which is expected to be (though often isn’t) common knowledge since the development of mandatory primary education. In this context, X comes to stand in for an unknown number or property that one is expected to solve for. An inability (or disinterest) to discover the value of X constitutes a failure and signals a lack of supposedly basic knowledge. This has special meaning in that “basic knowledge” as understood in systemically oppressive education institutions often excludes and/or marginalizes racialized, poor, disabled children. Failures, here, are politically and somatically loaded.

For Hartman (2007), X takes on both properties. It is a mark of the nonhuman, extending into the legal redefinition of black subjects, evidencing the disconnect between legal status and

full incorporation into the category of Man and presenting as a not so distant reminder of the enforced anonymity of both the bodies of slaves and the techniques of slavery that produced the X to begin with. It is part of the dispossession she writes, as well as a symbol she actively refuses when she engages with a well-established practice of name-changing.

Unwilling to accept the pain of this, I tried to undo the past and reinvent myself. In a gesture of self-making intended to obliterate my parents' hold upon me and immolate the daughter they hoped for rather than the one I was, I changed my name. (Hartman, 2007, p. 8)

Hartman's (2007) name change refuses one inheritance in the interests of conjuring up another. It is a precursor to the travels she narrates and a sign of the complex relationships with objecthood and subjectivity that present throughout *Lose Your Mother*.

Hartman's (2007) X is also a marker of an unknown property or value. It stands for a sense of belonging that is perpetually sought but never arrives. Instead, she is faced with the impossible strangeness of this particular X. The X is a promissory X (Ahmed, 2010b). Unlike the self-evident algebraic X, this X combines anonymity and strangeness, the compulsory and what has been made impossible.

It is only when you are stranded in a hostile country that you need a romance of origins; it is only when you *lose your mother* that she becomes a myth; it is only when you fear the dislocation of the new that the old ways become precious, imperiled, and what your great-great-grandchildren will one day wistfully describe as African. (Hartman, 2007, p. 98)

This is the elusive inheritance of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Hartman's (2007) encounters with the bodies and spaces of slaves do not, cannot, translate into a normative narrative of family. The content of X is absent. Looking at a photo of slaves at one of the museums she goes

to, she writes, “Love longed for an object, but the slaves were gone. In the dungeon, missing the dead was as close to them as I would come. And all that stood between artifice and oblivion was the muck on the floor” (Hartman, 2007, p. 135). Where love objects cannot be found, she mourns the muck. Where human bodies as such are ostensibly absent, she relates to traces that complicate boundaries between the living and non-living, animate and inanimate, humans and the refuse that remains. The monuments Hartman (2007) describes are messy, dirty, covered in refuse that cannot be swept away. They present in sharp contrast to those sanitized sites that are oh so familiar in North America and Europe. The kind of connections that emerge from them are far from familial, but nonetheless meaningful. They are a summoning, for better or for worse.

Sensations of absence and mourning are, of course, not exclusive to slave dungeons. Wendy Brown (1993) engages with oh-so-maligned, yet necessarily resilient “identity politics”: politics that speak back to embedded exclusions and the limitations of intersectionality. More than pointing to the utility and generativity of assemblage theory, however, Brown (1993) complicates identity politics by exploring the ways in which they are always already mired in suffering and what she terms “wounded attachments” (Brown, 1993). Brown (1993) saliently takes up Nietzsche’s concept of “ressentiment” to refer to “the moralizing revenge of the powerless” (p. 400). “Ressentiment in this context is a triple achievement: it produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms the hurt, it produces a culprit responsible for the hurt, and it produces a site of revenge to displace the hurt” (Brown, 1993, p. 401). Brown’s (1993) use of affect differs from that taken up here, mobilizing emotion and affect under the same heading and eliding meaningful differences between them. However, her analyses of hurt, oppression, and suffering as directly related to socio-economic processes of self-making highlight how mourning,

loss, and pain are not inherently radical affects. Rather, these negative positionalities often signal compulsory failure:

It is [the neoliberal subject's] situatedness within power, their production by power, and liberal discourse's denial of this situatedness and production that casts the liberal subject into failure, the failure to make itself in the context of a discourse in which its self-making is assumed, indeed, is its assumed nature. (Brown, 1993, p. 401)

Hartman's (2007) *Lose Your Mother* chronicles the wounded attachments Brown (1993) speaks of without closing the door on more generative analyses of suffering. Hartman's (2007) failure to make herself is a symptom of neoliberalism as well as a point of departure for understandings of racializing assemblages and affective encounters.

Butler (1995), writing from a similar academic, political, and temporal context as Brown (1993), addresses the notion of suffering in different, but complementary ways. Drawing from psychoanalytic analyses of mourning and melancholia, she engages with the notion of gender identification. Butler (1995) takes up Freud's notions of mourning and melancholia, noting that, for the former, there is purportedly refused identification and for the latter, a kind of debilitating and durational engagement. While mourning entails digesting a trauma and letting go of it, melancholia absorbs and holds trauma. Butler (1995) points to the ways in which the doing of gender is melancholic:

For there is no final breaking of the attachment: there is, rather, the incorporation of the attachment as identification, where identification becomes a magical, psychic form of preserving the object. And insofar as identification is the psychic preserve of the object, and such identifications come to form the ego, then the lost object continues to haunt and

inhabit the ego as one of the constitutive identifications and is, in that sense, made coextensive with the ego itself. (Butler, 1995, p. 22-23)

In Butler's (1995) analysis, gender identification is always melancholic; it lives on in bodies, unresolved, producing heteronormative subjectivities that are always living loss. I contend that the scope of Butler's (1995) analysis is limited both in its written omissions and the ways in which it relies on notions of an internal self, not necessarily known to a person but nonetheless a property of their human body. However, the idea that trauma is always present, figuring as an open wound is instructive. The crip, racialized bodies referenced throughout this thesis absorb lost objects. Hartman (2007), Fanon (1967), and Clare (1999) are melancholic: they live the loss Butler (1995) references. They attempt to mobilize Brown's (1993) wounded attachments as well as the failure that inevitably follows. Hartman's (2007) *Lose Your Mother* is a melancholic exercise: it sinks into ever present wounds, pokes and prods them, peels scabs and lets them bleed, and holds onto them desperately and ironically. Hartman (2007) absorbs losses, mutates flesh, and forms bonds that fall short of and exceed the familial.

In addition to trauma and melancholia, death might also be productively considered a central character in crip narratives and the flesh that runs through them. Death constitutes a perpetually informative encounter for those whose bodies are aligned with the dead and dying. Speaking to Agamben's work on necropolitics, but attempting to uncover a more generative theory and politic, Weheliye (2014) takes up the term "bare life" to refer to the irreducible substance that remains when subjects are stripped of all that might be associated with the human as such. Its historical emergence as a technology and effect of power can be traced through the plantation, colonial outpost, and the concentration camp (Weheliye, 2014, p. 37). These are spaces where humans are violently stripped of any semblance of subjectivity. However, what is

left is not necessarily abjection; “what remains is the flesh, the living, thinking, feeling, and imagining flesh” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 40). There is a tension, here, between Weheliye’s (2014) living flesh and the emphasis on finitude and mortality he finds in Agamben’s work. Both speak to the forms of corporeality bodies oriented towards debility and unhappiness absorb and emit. In many instances, disability in various forms and articulations has been taken up in ways resonant with (though clearly not identical to) the brutal exclusions that have taken place in the concentration camps, colonial outposts, and plantations referenced. In addition to figurations of disability and debility within camps, outposts, and plantations, we see overlap in other spaces and times. The enactment of forced sterilizations, a culture of rampant physical and sexual abuse, denial of reproductive rights, confinement in various biomedical institutions, use as expendable objects of medical and scientific experimentation, and overrepresentation in prisons, to name but a few examples, evidence how crip bodies have been and remain aligned with death.

However, an orientation towards “bare life” does not entail a totalizing dispossession. As bodies reduced to flesh, those aligned with debility are not without capacity. Braidotti (2000) proposes a reconsideration of an en fleshed body that speaks to a vitalist understanding of bodies and affects. She takes up an understanding of a Deleuzean body as “an assemblage of forces or passions that solidify (in space) and consolidate (in time) within the singular configuration commonly known as an ‘individual’” (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). Here, we see bodies redefined as “productive, forward-propelling force[s] of flows or intensities” (Braidotti, 2000, p. 161). Bare life is not an end result. It is not a precursor to death as the ultimate finitude. Rather, it marks a space from which intensities (or affects) take flight. It approaches death not as an end, but as characterized by an infinite number of conflicting and converging drives that draw attention to bodies that must continually be denied.

To claim a generative politic in an understanding of flesh that stems from such brutal acts of mass violence is a messy process. It is important to acknowledge the incredibly fraught character of this and prior analyses. To speak of stripped flesh and an ecstatic alignment with death no doubt means different things to different bodies. Haritaworn (2014) notes that it is “important to consider the uneven terms on which bodies interpellated as ‘queer’ or ‘racialized’ are sorted into various biopolitical and necropolitical molds” (p. 212). More specifically, they draw attention to how “the ability to embrace death presumes an ascendant subject already anchored in the realm of life” (Haritaworn, 2014, p. 212). Furthermore, discussing bodily deviance as productive must also involve a consideration of how notions of monstrosity and abnormality have been taken up as popular conceptual cites for such analyses, often implicitly or explicitly proposing a romanticized notion of reclamation. The able-bodied feminist academic flirting with the figure of the cyborg or a monster from gothic horror genres has relatively little in common with a person whose prosthetic limb marks them as monstrous at first glance, regardless of that persons intentions or desires (Reeve, 2012). At the same time, a desperate bid to realign marginalized bodies with “life” as it is popularly conceived carries its own dangerous elisions. To meaningfully consider all of these things, while keeping intact the relevant and productive aspects of many of the theoretical projects that labour under such tendencies, is to evidence a commitment to a material politic that engages with death, debility, and the bodies that are oriented towards them responsibly and responsively.

For it remains necessary to ask: what does it mean to connect to the dead, to be proximate to death, to *feel* death? Clare (2001) speaks of the death of Tracey Latimer, a disabled person whose life was taken by her father in a bid to “end her unbearable suffering” (p. 363). In Clare’s (2001) reading, Tracey Latimer’s body is “stolen for good” while “[o]thers live on—numb,

abandoned, full of self-hate, trauma, grief, aftershock” (p. 363). While Clare’s (2001) distinction between bodies stolen for good and those who are haunted by death is tenuous at best, what this telling speaks is how disabled, crip bodies relate in these forms of death and dying, for “pernicious stereotypes, lies, and false images can haunt a body, stealing it away as surely as bullets do” (Clare, 2001, p. 363). The crip bodies that are stolen in this way are queers, women, lower and/or working class, racialized bodies, as much as they are also “broken and tragic” disabled bodies (Clare, 2001, p. 362). They are bodies whose systemic oppression is in their bones and flesh.

Part and parcel of the politics of death are what Braidotti (2010) refers to as “the politics of life itself.” “The politics of life itself refers to the extent to which the notion of biopower has emerged as an organizing principle for the proliferating discourses and practices that make technologically mediated ‘life’ a self-constituting entity” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 201). Where “[o]ne of the most persistent and helpful fictions told about human life is its alleged self-evidence, its implicit worth” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 207), there is something fabulously self-destructive in the move towards the affective model Braidotti takes up. To rethink “the world through affectivity and not cognition: as a singularity, force, movement, through assemblages or web of interconnections with all that lives” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 210) is to go beyond an understanding that pits life against death, animate against inanimate, attempting to secure that infinitely permeable barrier. It is to highlight the ways in which life and death are not merely co-constitutive; they are co-existent. Affectivity “allows for a nonbinary way of positing the relationship between same and other, between different categories of living beings, and ultimately, between life and death” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 209).

Challenging boundaries between life and death holds special meanings for crip bodies. Where a disabled life is no life at all, and racialized bodies are aligned with death in a multitude of ways, to remain proximate to death is simultaneously a material and political position, and productively so. A narrative that takes up death, dying, and life—understanding them as continuous, durational, and non-linear—is able to speak suffering without any pretense of “authenticity but as instantiations of a radically different political imaginary, which refuses to only see feel, hear, smell, and taste bare life in the subjectivity of the oppressed” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 82). It follows that a way back to the alienated bodies of the oppressed might be through chemicals that alter whole ecosystems and parasites that move through skin to flesh, through passive object-hood, through a meaningful engagement with bodies that are something other than human, and a radical redefinition of life and death where both are held in tension and neither is conveniently descriptive.

Jayna Brown (2015) proposes that we “take further advantage of . . . scientific abilities to explore the queerness of the biological” (p. 323). These forms of queerness point to ways of relating that extend beyond familiar kinship structures. Brown (2015) states that analyses emerging within the life sciences may point to something vastly different, something that challenges notions of “ancestral dependency,” as well as holding the potential to erase “the very foundations of kinship based in heterosexual reproduction” (p. 323). Brown’s (2015) articulations of biological queering and queering the biological highlight forms of relationality that might circumvent the perpetual failures of connection throughout Hartman’s (2007) book. Furthermore, Brown’s (2015) work suggests that there are ways of being in ecologies that are more responsive and relevant to nuanced discussions of debility and ability than theories of individual subjectivities can account for.

That cells grow and change, and reproduce independently of individual bodies, destabilizes notions of individual subjectivity. When we destabilize these notions, what forms of subjectivity formation are possible? How far can we go in imaging, and practicing, life on other terms? What forms of sociality and the communal are available for us if we estrange ourselves from the life of our species? (Brown, 2015, p. 325)

Chen (2012) proposes one such understanding of sociality. They describe their relationship with their couch, noting the ways in which the couch, at times, is an extension of both their body and the body of their lover. During disability flare ups, they are held by the couch and sink into it the way that they sink into their lover. In Chen's (2012) account, the couch functions as part of their flesh. There is no clear boundary between themselves and the couch, alternately conceived, in medicalized terms, as an assistive device or prosthetic. The bond Chen (2012) narrates between themselves and the couch, however, is more than a relationship between object/subject. It is molecular. It exists at the point where the matter that constitutes their flesh merges with the frame, stuffing, and textile of what is conventionally considered a non-living or inanimate object.

Gill-Peterson (2014) explores the ways in which race and transgender are mobilized as different, but overlapping, forms of technicity. For Gill-Peterson (2014), "Technics and its specific technologies, rather than subordinate to the rational subject, can be thought of expansively, as life touching itself" (p. 406). Chen's (2012) narrative and subsequent analysis can be reconsidered according to this narrative of life touching itself, where the living and non-living and animate and inanimate are thought of in terms of degrees of animacy, rather than one or the other. Gill-Peterson (2014) writes: "Technology is not added to living beings. Life reaches beyond itself and returns to itself, touches itself and the world around it, in order to grow and change, to differ from itself over time, through an impure and yet necessary technical

disposition” (p. 407). Gill-Peterson (2014) draws connections between transgender and racialized embodiment, noting the ways in which race might be productively conceived of as a technology, in keeping with its historical and contemporary mobilizations. For Gill-Peterson (2014), race “is a historically inherited capacity for embodied techniques that, by virtue of being technical, carries with it the immanent ontological capacity of technics to swerve [. . .] toward futures that are not prescribed by the Enlightenment and colonialism” (p. 411). Race is “made ontological by technicity if by ontology we ask, ‘what is the *becoming* of race?’ instead of what race ‘is’” (Gill-Peterson, 2014, p. 411).

Multitudes in the making

I return to the circulation of substances whose animacy is perpetually obscured in favor of the shifting interests of neoliberal capitalism. Puar (2009) notes the ways in which the biotechnics of contemporary neoliberal capitalism have shifted away from notions of biological “essence” already critiqued for their racist, sexist, classist, Eurocentric, and ableist underpinnings, towards the redefinition and mobilization of human bodies as sites of information, rather than substance. Puar (2009) references “bio informatics,” and the ways in which many disabilities have been recoded as “informational errors” in need of correction, signaling a move away from historical emphases on curative medicine towards more statistical methods (p. 165). Drawing from Jain, Puar (2009) notes a move “from the disabled subject to the prognostic subject, from the subject of disability to the subject of prognosis, thus changing the category of disability itself” (p. 165). These changes undermine the identity based claims of some disability activists and theorists, allowing both for the proliferation of forms of biopolitical control in a changing post-Fordist

economy *and* potentially paving the way for more experimental encounters with contemporary circulations of biological data.

What follows is a brief examination of Preciado's (2013) experimental text, *Testo Junkie*. *Testo Junkie* is a durational performance taking up biological codes and contradictory prognoses to play with pre-existing somatic fictions in unexpected and unintended ways. Preciado's (2013) text describes enfolded experiments with illegally self-administering prescription testosterone. Part life narrative, part theory, his text is jarring and exciting (in multiple senses). *Testo Junkie* is eulogy, confession, erotica, and memoir as much as it is a hormonal historiography and analysis of a contemporary post-Fordist economy he describes as "pharmacopornographic" (Preciado, 2013). While Preciado's (2013) text does engage with race and racialization, mostly in a historical context, these analyses are often utilitarian, superficial, and unsatisfactory. His treatment of crip theory is even more disappointing. His text is self-admittedly narcissistic in many ways. What makes these elisions especially frustrating are the ways in which his analyses are so deeply indebted to crip and critical race theory, whether he knows it or not, and they have much to offer these fields, as well.

When Preciado (2013) writes his life, he names the other characters in play as initials. The love affair that runs throughout is with VD. Other friends, lovers, colleagues are similarly signaled with one or two letters. It becomes clear, though, that this is not a convention designed to protect the anonymity of others. Identifying details present throughout. Rather, this move signals a certain ambivalence with naming and a desire to simultaneously speak the presence of others while presenting them as data rather than substance. The bodies he relates to exist as a kind of code: other bodies are moments or props in his text, rather than rounded characters. In keeping with Puar's (2009) observations, the initials circulate in a pharmacopornographic era as

information, rather than flesh. Preciado (2013) plays with those codes to highlight them. Significantly, though, *Testo Junkie* begins with two namings that disrupt this code in the very moment when death sets the stage for what follows. Tim tells him that William is dead. William becomes, here, something more than a character. He is a bio-screen on which Preciado (2013) projects moments and encounters that follow. William's "mind unfurls and forms an electromagnetic layer from which our words flow. Your ghost is a wire transmitting our voices" (Preciado, 2013, p. 15). Death, here, animates in ways that the living figures in his book do not and cannot. It animates by facilitating the relationality of "living" human bodies.

Testosterone, often referred to as T, is similarly named. It is another animated death. "The testosterone molecule dissolves into the skin as a ghost walks through a wall" (Preciado, 2013, p. 67). It is part of a global regime of biopower, but it is also a potentiality: a place for "copyleft" experimentation (Preciado, 2013). The testosterone molecule is animate insofar as it is a mobile, shifting, absorbed substance; symptomatic and emblematic of the pharmacopornographic era (Preciado, 2013, p. 77). Testosterone is an example of "biomolecular, digital, and broadband data-transmission technologies. This is the age of soft, featherweight, viscous, gelatinous technologies that can be injected, inhaled—'incorporated'" (Preciado, 2013, p. 77). As such, testosterone has no pre-determined trajectory. It is an open technology, regulated by the state, but not exhaustively so. Testosterone sustains power regimes of gender and sexuality, but it also murders them. Preciado (2013), a self-identified "testo junkie," does not present himself as a singular figure of deviance. To rely on such a figuration is to return to humanist infrastructures already disputed. Rather, he's looking for "a network of trans-junkie experts, a monster-multitude-in-the-making" (Preciado, 2013, p. 394).

you are like me. Tempted by the same chemical abuse. You have it in you: you think you're cis-females, but you take the Pill; or you think you're cis-males, but you take Viagra; you're normal, and you take Prozac or Paxil in the hope that something will free you from your problems of decreased vitality, and you've shot cortisone and cocaine, taken alcohol and Ritalin and codeine . . . You, you as well, you are the monster that testosterone is awakening in me. (Preciado, 2013, p. 398)

And he, as well, is part of the monster-multitude. Indeed, the monster-multitude is a kind of black hole, eating up everything in its path and transforming it into an unknowable nothing.

The texts cited here are an evolving monstrous multitude. The deadly, toxic, passive relationships that emerge form complex circuits of affect that coalesce only to dissolve and come together elsewhere. They enter conversations, performing deviant dialogues that imagine relationalities not dependent on any one point of overlap. There is no consensus, only multiplication and diffusion. These theoretical engagements are performative. They enact the generativity of varied and often unpredictable encounters between ideas and bodies, humans and objects, and the material and the informational. They are *crip* insofar as they are aggressively anti-normative, overwhelmingly deviant, and lively in their passivity. They demonstrate the ways in which *crip* affect is not necessarily disabled affect, but rather a corporeal playground of floating embodiments of debility and capacity.

What emerges is a formulation of relationality that challenges bounded subjectivities, proposing an understanding of encounter that exceeds flesh as it necessarily engages it. There is no body singular, in fact, "the body" is largely irrelevant. Rather, it proposes an understanding of matter as infinitely plural and never contained by any skin or surface. The most "impermeable" boundaries are exposed as shifting and unstable, as limits placed on matter that necessarily

exceeds any kind of containment. Hartman's (2007) raincoat is a failed inheritance and an obstacle to engagement only insofar as it pluralizes and complicates it. Fanon's (1967) shrouded body is kicking and screaming. Clare's (1999) stones become flesh, and Chen's (2012) couch is their lover. The shit, urine, and rot compacted on the floor of slave dungeons facilitate deadly encounters and testosterone is a way to traverse boundaries between life and death, material and spectral (Hartman, 2007; Preciado, 2013). In place of the human body, there are only multitudes of monstrous matter.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

As I settle into the destructive impulses of this thesis, I feel some of my chronic anxiety gently shift to nervous excitement. The dishes near my kitchen sink sit a little longer, papers and books move from indexed, alphabetized file folders and shelves to little stacks near multiple writing surfaces. I invite old friends over, even leave the house to meet people a couple of times. My voice quivers impatiently when I talk theory, rather than shaking as I slip into a panic attack. My twitches and neurological vision disturbances are still there, as always, but when some electrical impulse in my brain fucks up and my words come out a little garbled, I keep right on going and enjoy the fact that *something* is coming out. When my balance fails and I fall, I give a fuck-you smile to whoever's watching and keep on my merry way. I enjoy the process of cleaning and bandaging scraped knees, fascinated by my shredded skin, instead of frustrated by its fragility. I find it all vaguely amusing, sometimes even feeling affection for these physical oddities.

This text wants to elicit discomfort, but more than that, it is an exercise in my own apocalyptic pleasure. Eli Clare—a queer, disabled writer, theorist, speaker, and activist who has been hugely influential to my own politics and academic life—inspired me, once upon a time, to reclaim my crip body. Tentative and conflicted, I've spent a great deal of time working on that, trying to find a positive attitude about things that make my brain fumble and stomach churn. I read Clare differently, now. When he asks me to own my frustration and rage, I think that's something I can do. When he asks crips to turn it into pride, to go about “reclaiming our bodies and changing the world,” I'm not inspired (Clare, 1999, p. 138). I feel like I'm being called out for my own failure to do so. It's not that I don't want to change the world, it's that I'm unconvinced that pride could do that: that pride could even manifest itself in any satisfactory

way. I'm not proud of my body, I do not feel at home there, and I doubt I ever will, but I do find its fallibility interesting and maybe even inspiring in a shame filled way.

As I come to feel at home in my shame, the anxiety that weighs on my sternum, compressing my lungs and twisting my guts into pieces never disappears. Rather, it ebbs and flows, manifesting in new and sometimes horrifying ways. Recently, I had a potentially cancerous mole removed: minor procedure. Routine, the plastic surgeon says. In our consult, he dismisses risks of infection, etc., focusing on the scar that will remain. The scar is the focus of our conversation. The scar is what sent me to him to begin with. My general practitioner referred me, stating "if it were on your back, I'd take it off right now, but it's on your *face*." Dear god, my face: that precious façade that is supposed to protect me from the invasive stares (glares) of other (presumably not-scarred) humans will forever be marked by physical deficiency. I don't argue. I rarely argue with health professionals anymore. I pick and choose my battles, and this one doesn't seem worth fighting. In the surgeon's office, he draws diagrams, repeats himself, becomes more and more visibly concerned with what he reads as my failure to understand the gravity of the scar. I understand, I just don't particularly care. I've got plenty of other things to worry about. His frustration and confusion amuse me, but I focus on projecting serious concern to appease him. Eventually he stops, ending by saying that I am a very nice girl. I am, finally, disconcerted and uncomfortable.

The procedure takes place under local anesthetic. I'm usually not squeamish about medical procedures—god knows I've had enough of them—but the odd, painless sensations of pressure and pulling, as well as the buzzing of the cauterizing tool and the smell of my own burning flesh are perturbing. Or maybe it's the pressure of being a nice girl. I feel the panic attack coming. I can't wait for it to be over so I can return to my bag and ingest one of the tiny

orange pills that trigger my parasympathetic nervous system, allowing me to get home without completely dissolving into the terrifying chaos. It helps. But then I get home, peel back the bandage and see the line of messy black stitches running across my face, feel them pulling with every facial movement, and the anxiety comes back. I hover in that state for days, always on the verge of the abyss. Every now and then I take a pill, give myself a bit of a break. I fear addiction and loss of control or structure. My partner stresses that they are valuable tools and I shouldn't fear them. I oscillate between believing her and resenting what I read as dependency.

The pills I take are benzos, aptly termed "downers." They are chemical compounds that penetrate my nervous system, altering perception and the capacity for invention. I can't write on them. I can perform basic functions, more or less, but it's all very robotic. I am in a kind of limbo state: neither absent nor present, living nor dead, animate nor inanimate, debilitated nor capacitated. Or, perhaps, I am all of these things at once. During these chemical encounters, I am nothing if not a downer. Eventually, I decline into a feverish malaise. The incision is infected. Benzos and bacteria have a lot in common, it seems. I don't need the pills anymore. Other toxins flow through my veins, producing a similar effect. The infection is in my bloodstream: a kind of satisfying irony, given the previous emphasis on the scar.

These are chemical bonds that complicate distinctions between outside and inside. They are one example of Preciado's (2013) insistence on absorption and diffusion. Anesthetic, surgical technologies, pills (a veritable cornucopia of them), and staphylococcus bacteria enter into a blood-soaked dialogue from which something like subjectivity emerges. They circulate in my body as inseparable technologies. Each treatment, each prescription forms a chemical (Chen, 2011, 2012, 2013) and kinesthetic encounter, yoking my flesh to pharmacopornographic regimes (Preciado 2013) crip economies (Johnson and McRuer, 2015), and the monstrous multitudes they

effect. Intent figures into these encounters only on the most superficial level. Where my mental faculties fail me and normative societal participation occurs only through robotic movements and learned instinct, I find myself that much more attuned to the messy, blurry, impossible to articulate affects that are always present but rarely engaged with.

Crip futures

I ambivalently adhere to a certain tradition, here, for conclusions, more often than not, gesture towards the future in some way and I am not immune to the appeal of such proposals. Futurity, progress, hope, whatever (a rose by any other name . . .), are indisputably intoxicating. As such, the future is neither possible nor desirable to dismiss. Ahmed (2010b), Duggan and Muñoz (2009), Edelman (2004), Halberstam (2005), and so many more critique these preoccupations, but never abandon them. For better or worse, they are indisputably central to social justice oriented theory and politics. No matter how much we resent doing so, we are hopelessly attached to even the smallest glimpse of justice (a happy ending). Becoming downer is not impervious to these impulses. It does not happen in a vacuum. Additionally, its temporal dimensions position it in such a way that it is far from irrelevant to discuss futurity here. However, becoming downer challenges futurity in that it involves an alignment away from longevity—a future marked by its absence. This absence of a future might be thought of as a paradoxical, ironic, and very crip form of futurity worth exploring here.

A starting point for discussions of crip futurity productively begins with an analysis of the kind of futurity that crips can never have. Halberstam (2005) draws attention to the ways in which temporal trajectories are normatively associated with individual life courses, deviant or desirable. The construction of a “normal” that is so central to western mobilizations of power is

intimately tied to what Halberstam (2005) refers to as “a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality” (p. 4). This heteronormative logic relies on particular narratives of childhood, adolescence, and inevitable maturation that includes marriage, reproduction, a white picket fence, etc. The notion of a normative life course enters, here, as one of the many happy objects disabled people are oriented away from (Ahmed, 2010b). Associations between disability and extended adolescence, asexuality, reproductive incapacity (stemming from the body or imposed by eugenic logics), and economic dependence position crip bodies as outside of straight time, in many of the same ways that Halberstam’s (2005) queers are. Additionally, normative temporalities “applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 4). People whose life course cannot or will not conform to this desperate pursuit for ever-increasing time, where more is always better, are, again, oriented away from the happy object that is longevity. Crips, whose days are always already numbered, are the stuff of nightmares and cautionary tales: fodder for our own extinction.

Halberstam’s (2005) writing draws from Edelman’s (1998) work on futurity, or lack thereof. For Edelman (1998; 2004) the future is oriented around the figure of the child as both a site of social anxiety (“save the children!”), and as an object of worship, relating to Halberstam’s (2005) “reproductive temporality.” What does this mean for the crips who are forever confined to childhood just as children are forever denied them. The child the crip embodies is not oriented towards a future, rather it is a child in stasis. While paternalism and protectionist arguments remain in place in many respects, their function is altered. The crip child is infantilized so as to render silent—neither seen nor heard. It is not to a figure to be valorized or around which to organize. The crip child (throughout their life course) is oriented away from the future.

Edelman's (1998; 2004) child of the future is protected with the kind of vehemence accorded self defense: survival instinct, even. The child of the future (and the future in the child) promises corporeal longevity. The crip child can only promise debility and death. In this context, crips end up with all of the paternalism and none of the promise.

For Edelman (1998; 2004), an alignment away from the future is a precursor to the kind of anti-normative queer politic that begins with a meaningful identification with a Lacanian death drive, that is, "an energy of mechanistic compulsion whose structural armature exceeds the specific object, the specific content, toward which we might feel that it impels us" (Edelman 1998, p. 26). The death drive points to a place outside of the symbolic (in Edelman's theorization, this is located in the figure of the child) without making any false claims regarding a possibility of labouring wholly outside the reach of the child as future. For Edelman (1998), it is a matter of "*embodying*, within the historical moment that imposes upon us such a figural association, the unsymbolizable remainder of the real produced by the order of meaning as the token of what that order is necessarily barred from being able to signify" (p. 27). That "unsymbolizable remainder" speaks back to the affective interruptions and corporeal mis-fits tied up in crip bodies, further elucidating the ways in which crip practices of embodiment pose fundamental challenges to a corporeal order of which they nonetheless remain a part.

So if the future is, indeed, "kid stuff," as Edelman (1998; 2004) asserts, then is a call for no future the only route to an effective crip critique? Perhaps not. Muñoz (2009), rather than doing away with the notion of futurity altogether, attempts to formulate a distinctly queer future, dissociated from the futurity signaled by Edelman's (1998; 2004) child. He writes, "I point to a queer feeling of hope in the face of hopeless heteronormative maps of the present where futurity is indeed the province of normative reproduction" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 28). Such an understanding

of the future wrests the affective and emotive force from hope as it is popularly constructed and resituates it within an anti-normative framework that proposes very different investments. A queer future, for Muñoz, is a future that embraces an ever-receding horizon. This is not Ahmed's (2010b) horizon, where happiness, in some self-evident form, always lies just beyond reach, resulting in a constant striving for and production of more of the same. Rather, it looks even further for something hugely different, something we haven't seen yet. Muñoz (2009) attempts to rework the dominant logic where the future is already articulated in the now, just as happiness is already assumed as known, or the future of the child produces the logic of the present and vice versa. A queer (or crip) futurity entails an "ecstatic and horizontal temporality [that] is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25). That openness, spatial and temporal, is not bounded by the pragmatic politics Muñoz associates with gay assimilationist movements. It is irrational, changeable, and based in an infinite idealism untethered from positivity.

In a conversation with Lisa Duggan on hope and hopelessness (2009), Muñoz further explores the possibility for a productively queer formulation of futurity. Taking up a discussion of negative feelings and affects and the potential therein, he observes:

Negative sentiments like cynicism, opportunism, depression, bitchiness, are often seen as solipsistic, individualistic, and anti-communal affective stances associated with an emotional tonality of hopelessness. Yet these bad sentiments can signal the capacity to transcend hopelessness. (Duggan and Muñoz, 2009, p. 277)

Here, Muñoz outlines the origins of what he terms "educated hope" (Duggan and Muñoz, 2009, p. 278). "Practicing educated hope is the enactment of a critique function. It is not about announcing the way things *ought* to be. It is thinking beyond the narrative of what stands for the

world today by seeing it as not enough” (Duggan and Muñoz, 2009, p. 278). Educated hope is the hope of the downers—those that give literal form to the “not enough” Muñoz references. It is *crip hope*—an orientation towards a future other than happiness. It is optimism without a positive attitude, and as such, it is so much more powerful.

Idiopathis

I will end with a particular matter-ing of the corporeal accident that is idiopathy. The idiopathic body is a body whose “individual” symptoms form an indistinct and variable pathology. This is becoming-downer as I feel it in the brain tissue, nervous system, flesh and blood that I live with daily as a person with idiopathic medical conditions. So-called idiopathic conditions—those that defy or exceed medical knowledge and intervention—point towards an impactful realization of downer-ness. Idiopathic conditions, by virtue of their stubborn resistance to diagnosis, highlight the places where medical knowledge and bodily symptoms fail to match up; they draw attention to a mis-fit that runs throughout readings and experiences of disability. Idiopathic conditions, by virtue of going unnamed and unknown, have no place in a *crip economy* (Johnson and McRuer, 2014). Without a prescribed pharmaceutical or medical treatment, they lack potential for profit. Without a diagnostic banner under which to mobilize consumer pageants and/or research expenditures, their debility dollars go largely unspent. The only possible medical responses tend towards shot-in-the-dark tests that are quickly exhausted, yielding nothing but “wasted” health expenditures and thinly veiled question marks. Idiopathic conditions not only fail neoliberalism and global capitalism, they fail the various social and political infrastructures that feed into and are fed by them. By virtue of their sheer variance (for this is one of the key reasons why they remain idiopathic: if they had the numbers they would no doubt be given at least a working title),

these unintelligible embodiments are inexhaustible. Without any corresponding diagnosis, idiopathic conditions are pure symptomology. These symptoms, in their unintelligibility, cannot be translated into emotion, language, or diagnosis; rather, they are corporeal interruptions or affects. They are the inconvenient perceptions that can only be communicated in convoluted sentence fragments and elaborate metaphors that never quite hit the mark. Where the only parameters are in the flesh, so are the symptoms; in fact, they aren't even really symptoms anymore, so much as sensations. As bodies acquire these sensations, circulate them, even promote them, they become idiopathic in and of themselves.

Idiopathy is a fancy term circulated in medical communities that serves as a placeholder of sorts, trying to name (and therefore know) something that defies or exceeds medical knowledge and intervention. It identifies some sort of bodily wrongdoing, but no form of address. The Oxford English Dictionary provides the following for idiopathy: 1) “origin of a disease or disorder in the affected part only, or as a primary process independent of other disease;” 2) “In later use: unexplained or unknown causation (of a disease or disorder);” 3) “A feeling or sensation experienced only by a particular person; an individual or personal state of feeling” (“idiopathy,” 2016). Idiopathy, for my purposes, challenges notions of origin as well as the description of idiopathy as “individual or personal” (“idiopathy,” 2016). Rather, it emphasizes the irony of the “unexplained or unknown” as well as the characterization of idiopathy as primarily sensory (“idiopathy,” 2016). Because idiopathy references a vast unknown, the idea that one can isolate an “affected part,” or “origin” is untenable (“idiopathy,” 2016). The impulse to do so demonstrates the generative tensions elicited by the term.

Edelman (2004) takes up Lacan's formulation of the *sinthome* to describe an alternate framing of subjectivity, one that binds without bounding. The *sinthome* “admits no translation of

its singularity and therefore carries nothing of meaning” (Edelman, 2004, p. 35). He coins the term “*sinthomosexuality*” to describe an “identification with one’s *sinthome* instead of a belief in its meaning” (Edelman, 2004, p. 37). Meaning, here, might alternately be referred to as singularity or finality. It is no coincidence that Lacan’s *sinthome* is figured as an archaic term that later evolved into the term “symptom.” The disconnect between *sinthome* and symptom parallels that between the symptomology of disability and the *sinthomology* of *crip idiopathy*. For idiopathic bodies, the symptom and the *sinthome* are interchangeable, for neither carries self-evident meaning, but rather serves as a “knot that holds the subject together, that ties or binds the subject to its constitutive libidinal career, and assures that no subject, try as it may, can ever ‘get over’ itself” (Edelman, 2004, p. 35-36). The *sinthome* is provisional, but it is also unavoidable. The idiopathic body is *sinthomatic*, proliferating provisional identifications and tentative subjectivities.

Idiopathic bodies are hilarious. They laugh in the face of biomedicine and the state. They defy dominant narratives of disability, twisting them in a very *crip* way. In their resistance to capture, they challenge dominant frameworks of understanding regarding illness, health, disability, and ability, highlighting the effects of racialized doings (Muñoz, 2006) and other marginalized affective encounters. The bodies and sensations they bring to light are downers in that they signal not only biological failures and/or deficiencies, but also deficiencies in the models through which different bodies are commonly read. By exposing failures, they draw attention to the systemic fallibility of western biomedical models and the forms of expert knowledge and intervention that have been associated with progress, longevity, and a good, happy life. The sensations that emerge from idiopathic bodies are read as negative, for they are hopeless. There is no promise of happiness because there are no prescribed or expected means of

getting there (Ahmed, 2010b). Idiopathic bodies, in their resistance to medical treatment or cure, are bodies that traverse the imaginary boundaries between living and dead, for they sometimes are and may very well be deadly, but they also might not: who knows? “How much time do I have left, doc?” Ha. Even approximations are a joke, here. No matter how you frame it, idiopaths have no future. They live in death and/or cease to exist. The idiopathic body is the optimism of the hopeless; a space from which to fashion an understanding of crip-ness where pre-existing, self-evident knowledges fall short. It is never normative, because there are no relevant norms to call upon. It produces and multiplies incoherent collectivities, and that is the closest thing to “a future worth fighting for” for which downers can hope.

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