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Freaks for Intimacy. Bonds, Conflicts, and Desires That Make Us Thrive



Fig. 1. *Freaks for Intimacy*. Photo by Kateřina Kolářová and Alyson Patsavas. Prague, 2013. Courtesy of the authors.

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We open the introduction to this special issue on queer and crip intimacies and cripqueer worldmaking with a photo of a crip double-headed monster—a shadow play of two people hugging, leaning against a walking stick. This spontaneous photo of two lovers was snapped in sunny summer Prague, in front of the DOX gallery, which in 2013 hosted the *Disabled by Normality* (*Postižení Normalitou*) show of local disability history and international takes on disability art. The exhibition coupled material traces of colonial practices, eugenic logic, and institutionalization collected from Czech museums with works by international disabled and queer artists that offered radical re-envisionings of humanity and rejected the ways in which (racialized, gendered, sexed, trans*ed, classed) disability had been used to legitimize violent acts of dehumanization, maiming, and killing. The shadow of a loving hug thus echoes the queercrip knowledge that transpired from that confrontation carried out in the gallery space: embracing, hugging, and desiring beyond the normate give life; monstrosity and freakishness open the door to imagining, loving, desiring, and making the world otherwise.

When we, Katarzyna and Kateřina, talked about how to preface this extensive collection of work exploring cripqueer intimacies, the joyousness, conflicts, desire, hard work, bliss, and impossibility, Kateřina recalled that old picture she and her partner took in Prague. It shows a reflection that becomes something else, superimposed over the hot pavement, its cracks calling up the many overlaid, palimpsestic scars of hurt, pain, and trauma that the bodies held but that only came out and could be lived through in the figure of the freak—an embodiment that is more than one and less than two, an embodiment of interdependence that is built on the recognition of different knowledges and politics of disability, queerness, and situatedness. As the monstrous figure lives on the pavement whose cracks host plants that manage to survive in the inhospitable asphalt- and concrete-scapes, the image holds another layer of intimacies: the interconnectedness and interdependence of the human embodiments with the more-than-human ecologies, entangled and mutually constituted.

As the editors of the issue, we (Kateřina and Katarzyna) share a commitment to transnational disability studies and to offering a space for exchange among various streams of disability studies—with different questions, different emphases, different vocabularies, and different imaginaries and utopias. We have both translated canonical disability studies texts into our respective national languages and attempted to contribute to the scholarly, artistic, and activist exchanges. Here we give space to others who have been part of this expansive more-than-academic journey with us. We proposed the topic of crip and queer intimacies to *Text*

Matters in response to pressing global issues—ongoing military conflicts, humanitarian crises, right-wing populism, neoliberal individualism, and climate destruction. In these challenging times, we believe it is essential to forge alliances, interdependencies, (non-: bio, hetero, cis, white and nationalist, anthropocentric) kinships, and (alter)intimacies. Like many scholars in disability, queer, feminist, and posthuman studies, we see and feel an urgent need to reconnect with the world and ourselves through responseable and care-ful bonds that foster pleasure and intimacy. Hence, by focusing on the subversive and creative energies of queercrip intimacies and their aesthetic and political dimensions, we called for works that would explore a wide range of affects, sensations, pleasures, and vulnerabilities, and the ways of embodying, knowing, and understanding that they produce.

We dedicate this issue to Alice Wong; her note that "[i]ntimacy is more than sex and romantic love. Intimacy is an ever-expanding universe composed of a myriad of heavenly bodies. Intimacy is about relationships within a person's self, with others, with communities, with nature and beyond" (xviii) echoes through many of the articles assembled in this issue. *Disability Intimacy: Essays on Love, Care, and Desire*, in which Wong created a space where contributors offer insights into forty ways of looking at intimacy, was one of our inspirations. Collaborating with *Text Matters*, we hoped to translate these explorations of cripqueer intimacies into broader transnational contexts. We hoped to draw explorations of intimacy that grows sideways and blooms with stutter in various kinds of relationships and connections based on love, sex, desire, friendship, kinship, partnership, community, and collegiality—but that also can and need to emerge from and amidst conflicts and solidarity, often in spite of war, precarity, dispossession, and other debilitating conditions.

Crip, as used in the title of the issue, refers to the reclaiming of the slur by members of disability/disabled communities as an act of pride, as well as opening up new meanings beyond articulation in the present moment, beyond identity. In this sense, the word shares the history of the term queer and the aspirations of critical queerness. Carrie Sandahl also notes that what both crip and queer, being "fluid and ever-changing, claimed by those whom [they] did not originally define" (27), have in common is a "radical stance toward concepts of normalcy; both argue adamantly against the compulsion to observe norms of all kinds (corporeal, mental, sexual, social, cultural, subcultural, etc.)" (26). This definition of queerness and cripness encourages thinking broadly about different intersections, coalitions, as well as tensions and frictions between various identities, positionalities, ways of being, and diverse political, geographical, and cultural contexts.

We wish to highlight that conflicts play an essential role in building queercrip intimacies. Some such tensions have emerged around crip self-identification, since the term carries a painful history of discrimination and abuse (see, e.g., Kuppers and Marcus 107–12). Most recently, those tensions have also been evident in Eastern European contexts, where the English word, even when translated, has sometimes faced distrust and resistance, as it does not fully capture the complexities and ambiguities of local disability experiences (see, e.g., Żeglicka) and raises questions about Western cultural imperialism. In some instances, it has been appropriated and rewritten so that it resists easy identification within the Anglophone perspective (e.g., in the Czech versions of *kvír* and *krip* or the Polish *kalekowanie*), imbuing the terms with different epistemological histories and archives. However, we strongly believe that the ruptures and dissonances within and between crip and queer, as well as their convergences and alliances, have transformative potential that can help reimagine and remake the world. Thus, we hope that this issue of *Text Matters* will help to keep these often heated and difficult international, intercultural, intersectional, and interspecies multilogues going.

The issue opens with a non-normative cripqueer academic article. It has the form of a roundtable to which we invited scholars, activists, and artists from the so-called Western and Eastern countries to share their perspectives on the basic concepts and ideas that inform this issue. The roundtable is followed by a piece of life-writing where two contributors generously share their racialized and ethnicized experiences of their crip-queer intimacy. In this way, we want to acknowledge the important role that this genre and, more broadly, queercripistemologies, i.e. situated knowledges coming from first-hand experiences of disability and queerness (Johnson and McRuer), have been playing in academia by challenging and subverting fixed models and definitions as well as helping formulate new research questions. The next six articles examine different forms of not only interhuman cripqueer intimacies but also intimate companionship with the more-than-human: comic books, mosaics, the more-than-human environments—both already materialized and imagined. This is followed by reflections on how queercrip intimacies have been serving as interventions into virtual, social, activist, and academic landscapes in Russia, Taiwan, and Spain. The final selection of texts looks at drama, theatre, performance, and film as spaces of forging, (re-)imagining, and expressing cripqueer intimacies across various periods and regions, including contemporary and Elizabethan Britain, Western Europe (Germany and Spain), and Poland, closing with a reflection on how contemporary cripqueer artivism may open new pathways toward queercrip futures.

We are grateful to all who have helped us create this issue, including our human and more-than-human partners and companions. We appreciate the reviewers' time and valuable feedback, as well as the editorial team's caring support. Most importantly, we thank the contributors for their generous engagement with our and the reviewers' remarks and suggestions, and for the depth and rigor of their analyses and arguments. We have learnt a lot from you! Instead of a conclusion to this introduction, we shout out for more explorations of cripqueer intimacies—and/or critiques of the limits of such framing—especially those that reflect on knowledges, experiences, and utopian imaginaries from spaces we could not reach.

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