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"May the earth heave up to bring us close": Landscaping Bodies in Petra Kuppers and Neil Marcus's *Cripple Poetics: A Love Story*

ABSTRACT

Rooted in the conviction that landscapes embed the performance of gender and sexuality, the article explores the potential of real and imaginary landscapes for fostering intimacy and erotic expression as depicted in Petra Kuppers and Neil Marcus's *Cripple Poetics: A Love Story*, where the lovers become travellers, "wayfarers," and "seafarers," traversing physical and imaginary landscapes and exploring various modes of erotic mobility along the way. In the poems, desire transforms the lovers' bodies into landscapes, with extensive imagery pointing to waterscapes and stressing their transformative and liberating potential. Finally, the movement of imagination as a sensual gesture is reflected in the landscape of the text: the flow of words on the page often reflects the freedom of movement reclaimed and established through (landscaped) erotic pleasure. The article discusses the three layers of landscaping present in the text—bodies *in* (physical and imaginary) landscapes, bodies *as* landscapes, and textual landscapes—focusing on the authors' employment of ecorelationality as a strategy of fostering intimacy and crip sexuality.

Keywords: *Cripple Poetics*, Petra Kuppers, Neil Marcus, poetry, love poetry, landscape, ecorelationality, ecosexuality.

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INTRODUCTION: FROM LANDSCAPED BODIES TO LANDSCAPING CRIP INTIMACIES

The use of landscape imagery in love poetry has ancient roots; still, in the Western tradition, it typically concerns depicting female bodies as landscapes ready to be explored and conquered by men. In the Song of Solomon, the bride is likened to "a garden inclosed," waiting for her beloved to enter and collect her "pleasant fruits" (4:12); in "Elegy 19. Going to Bed," John Donne imagines the body of his lover as his "America" or his "new-found-land" (1084), associating erotic pleasures with the joy of geographic discovery and conquest. The patriarchal and colonial undertones of such a use of landscape metaphors have been exposed by ecofeminist scholars;[1] now, with the growing sensitivity to the reality of landscapes as loci of intimate entanglements involving more-than-human lives, a different mode of poetic language becomes available, foregrounding intimacy and celebrating relationality.

In Petra Kuppers and Neil Marcus's *Cripple Poetics: A Love Story* (2008), advertised as "a love story for crip culture" (Kuppers and Marcus n.pag.), the immersion of bodies in landscapes and reimagining of bodies as landscapes become the primary source of sensual pleasure and a model for fostering crip intimacy, which is then mapped onto the loving relationship between the two authors, who are featured in double roles as both creators and subjects. The volume—usually described as a poetry collection, but in fact offering a free-flowing combination of poems, recorded conversations, snippets of essays, and life writing—records Kuppers and Marcus's love story through a combination of text and photographic material (contributed by Lisa Steichmann). Kuppers, who is a performance artist and a disability culture activist as well as an author and academic, and Marcus (1954–2021), author, activist, and performer, created a work both intimate and personal as well as having a wider resonance, extending, as one critic notes, "to the disability community as a whole, and to the nature of disability art and culture itself" (Sandahl n.pag.).

Published in 2008, *Cripple Poetics* has attracted some critical attention and appreciation, centred especially on the collaborative character of the volume and its experimental, creative form, informed by both authors' prior experience in performing arts (see e.g., Sandahl; Gould). In her thoughtful review published in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Carrie Sandahl notes that Kuppers and Marcus's poetry "has a performance quality to it," as the authors "explore the interrelatedness between movement, speaking, and writing" (n.pag.). In Sandahl's reading, the juxtaposition of

[1] See e.g., Kolodny or Merchant.

natural settings and textual forms shaped by "electronic modes of long-distance communication" (n.pag.) produces a unique form of discourse, allowing the authors not only to resist the dominant culture's tendency for the medicalisation of the disabled body, but also push the boundaries of the poetic genre to "develop a method of writing collaboratively that accommodates [the other person]'s impairments" (n.pag.). In this article, I propose a reading focused on the exploration of landscapes in *Cripple Poetics* in order to examine the ways in which the poets enlist the natural world as their primary ally in discovering new ways of exploring their physical and emotional connection. The sections of the book—one of which is, significantly, titled "Landscape"—reflect their intense enjoyment of relationality, encompassing both one's partner and the entire more-than-human world, as well as their expanding reflection on the importance of ecorelationality for crip and queer sexuality and intimacy.

This article explores three layers of landscaping present in the text—bodies in (physical and imaginary) landscapes, bodies as landscapes, and textual landscapes—drawing on theoretical reflection associated with bodyscaping, ecorelationality, and ecosexuality. In the following sections, landscaping and ecosexuality are discussed as crucial components in fostering crip and queer intimacies, followed by a discussion of various modes of landscaping present in the text.

CRIP AND QUEER INTIMACIES IN (SPECULATIVE) LANDSCAPES

The association of landscape with the body is primary, rooted in the simple fact that, as Douglas Porteous explains in his foundational work *Landscapes of the Mind*, "the human body is the first landscape we encounter and explore" (84). The connection is evident in corporal metaphors that we commonly use to describe various landscapes—we speak of "a neck of land," "the mouth of the river," "the face of the earth," etc. (76–77). At the same time, we inscribe various characteristics of landscape and landscape-related activities onto the human body. In his book, John Wylie (6) draws attention to the meaning ascribed to *landscape* as a verb, meaning to "physically shape" and "modify" with a view of "improving the land," thus strongly hinting at disciplining practices. Introducing the term *bodyscape*, Porteous explains how the body "becomes a personal landscape to enhance" (71), and corresponding landscaping practices may include clothing, hairstyling or hair removal, makeup, weight loss or gain, bodybuilding, aesthetic surgery, tattooing, scarification, etc. The argument that Porteous does not raise, however, is that these bodyscaping practices

are not equally available to every body, with factors such as age, health, or dis/ability playing a major role. This becomes especially important, considering that the abovementioned practices are socially and culturally significant, as they allow individuals to signal their values and social status, but also to perform their gender and sexuality.

The tendency to inscribe landscape onto the body and vice versa is also present in commonly used sexual metaphors, especially those linked to the female body; to the point that, as Porteous suggests, the culmination of the "body as landscape" is "pornotopia" (70). Viewing naked bodies and their artistic representations as "a kind of fleshly landscape" (71) is especially problematic since it often implicitly promotes patriarchal sexual norms. Bodies inscribed as landscape are thus "explored" and "penetrated" (71), conquered, shaped, and disciplined. The links between this mode of thinking and colonial exploitation or misogyny have been exposed by such feminist critics as Annette Kolodny or Carolyn Merchant; it merits a commentary, however, that the typical conceptualisations of bodies as landscapes are seldom open to queerness, fluidity, and relationality.

At the same time, as queer theorist Sara Ahmed argues, sexuality can never be separated from landscape, as "bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space" (67). In other words, how we are "orientated sexually" is determined not only by the "objects we are orientated towards, but also how we extend through our bodies into the world" (68). In her essay "Is Landscape Queer?," Kate Thomas argues that "bodies are produced by landscape, just as landscape is made by us," and the queerness of landscape depends on rejecting ontological difference and instead exploring "shifting relationality in and of and across landscape" (235). Thomas suggests that contrary to a (normative) detached view of the cartographer, queerness is embedded in landscape perceived from close proximity, as this perspective illuminates its complexity and biodiversity, its enmeshed nature rooted in a variety of entangled life forms, which permits—and is dependent on—variation and plurality.

This is not to say that all landscapes are equally conducive to crip intimacy and sexuality. As David Bell and Gill Valentine argue in *Mapping Desire* (1995), landscapes can be either "liberatory or oppressive sites for the performance of our sexed selves" (87), and this remains true with respect to both physical and cultural landscapes. As Katarzyna Ojrzyńska, among others, points out, the image of a person with a disability as a suffering individual who is denied access to pleasure has become established in culture ("Kalekowanie" 71); the same sentiment is expressed by s. e. smith in the essay "Skin Hunger and the Taboo of Wanting to be Touched": "There is a popular sense that disabled people are un-date/touch/knowable, that we neither want to establish romantic and sexual relationship nor are we capable. To put it mildly, *dating in this landscape is challenging*" (120, emphasis mine).

The difficulties associated with the performance of crip sexuality can equally be linked to physical landscapes, posing challenges not only in terms of travel and commute, essential components in LDRs (long-distance-relationships) and LATs (living-apart-together, i.e. non-cohabiting) relationships, which are increasingly common forms of romantic and sexual involvement in contemporary Western culture, but also by limiting access to social events offering an opportunity to meet potential partners. In *Cripple Poetics*, Kuppers presents an account of what she describes as a "very upsetting experience" (43), when she found herself separated from her friends at a concert and unable to navigate the venue without their assistance. In her description of the incident, a clear link is established between the sense of disempowerment resulting from the daunting confrontation with a space with insufficient access and the sense of emotional isolation, prohibitive for intimacy: "Independence was out of my crip reach. Loneliness fell over me" (44).

Conversely, certain physical landscapes may, through their characteristics, have a liberating effect, fostering crip and queer intimacies. In recent studies, ecosexuality and ecorelationality have been discussed as potential strategies of seeking out such favourable landscapes in natural environments (as opposed to disciplined, terraformed landscapes). Ecorelationality, described by Ojrzyńska as a way of relating to the world rooted in "a lived experience of unity and (inter)dependence with the environment and an encounter with the nonhuman (or dehumanized) Other" ("Ecorelational Aesthetics" 491), foregrounds the sense of connection and vulnerability. Instead of patriarchal hierarchies and domination, it creates space for non-anthropocentric exchanges and interactions, where no modes of embodiment, mobility, and sexuality are framed as inferior to others. For this reason, as Ojrzyńska explains, ecorelationality can provide a fruitful ground when combined with a disability perspective, as more-than-human alliances "facilitate dismantling ableism and anthropocentrism as well as help us build a new, more equitable and closer relationship with the environment that we live in as well as with ourselves—as fragile and vulnerable subjects" (492).

As a result, the sense of isolation and exclusion permeating some of the abovementioned accounts of crip sexuality can be replaced by what Ojrzyńska describes as "ecosexual pleasure" (see English abstract to "Kalekowanie"), stemming from a pervading sense of lived interaction with the natural environment, and the perception of nature as pluralistic and collaborative, rather than driven by the logic of sameness and competition. Ecorelational pleasure, as Ojrzyńska explains, is open to "alternative modes of being in the world" ("Kalekowanie" 70, translation mine) and as such is close to the concept of ecosexuality as discussed by Annie Sprinkle

and Beth Stephens, who argue that it requires "a more expanded" view of sexuality and sexual pleasure that goes "beyond mainstream definitions" (*Assuming the Ecosexual Position* 2); it is thus essentially queer. In their *Ecosex Manifesto*, Sprinkle and Stephens insist that the performance of sexuality should be founded on "collaboration with nature"; it can also expand the notion of sexuality, as Greta Gaard suggests, to encompass the "eco-erotic bricolage of gender, species, nature" (266). As Louis van den Hengel points out, ecosexuality "acknowledges that human sexuality is always already entangled with the entire material world," as well as offers a way of expanding the view of sexuality as a distinct property of humans "towards a more holistic view on erotic desire as an irreducible intermeshing of human and nonhuman intimacies" (332). As a result, ecosexuality is, as Ewelina Jarosz explains, an attitude of openness to "expanding the queer politics of identity to include more-than-human worlds" (268). From an ecosexual perspective, Jarosz argues, nature becomes "a desired, positive and diverse ally" (269) in seeking sexual expression and intimacy.

Although the sense of deep interconnectedness with natural landscapes and more-than-human actants that is essential to ecosexuality is an embodied experience, my argument here is that it can also become part of imagined landscapes of intimacy, fostering crip and queer sexualities. As Catherine Belsey indicates in her study *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994), desire "can go anywhere" (16)—moreover, it allows us the freedom to explore "what it would be like to occupy a space that cannot exist" (89). Ojrzyńska concedes that "reclaiming the right to pleasure is often a difficult and complex process" ("Kalekowanie" 71, translation mine), and mediation through imagination appears to be especially important for crip sexuality. In her essay "Republics of Desire: Disabled Lineages of Longing," Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha suggests that "in a world where disabled people are some of the most vulnerable to both rape and rejection, perhaps sometimes we use pining and fantasy . . . as a way to create a freedom space of dream that is safe. Perhaps . . . we sometimes have sex and access pleasure in ways that stay in fantasy" (153).

In their work, Kuppers and Marcus show how ecorelational imagination—both rooted in actual ecorelational experience and purely speculative—can be a powerful ally in exploring and enhancing crip intimacies.

BODIES IN LANDSCAPE AND LANDSCAPING BODIES

The crucial role of landscape imagery in *Cripple Poetics* is made evident from the outset. The opening poem in the volume, titled "The Metaphor of Wind in Cripple Poetics," depicts cripple as simultaneously "flesh and

bone" *and* landscape. The lines "There is always wind in my cripple / Off shore breezes" (7) construe "cripple" as a natural space, offered up for the interplay of the elements. The closing lines of the poem, picturing "cripple" as "a blown about newspaper" and "an ox in a rice field, ploughing earth" (7), add yet more complexity, establishing "cripple" as a shapeshifter, freely transgressing the boundaries between human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, bodies and landscapes.

The poem sets the tone for the entire collection, in which intimate encounters between the two lovers are accompanied by their loving interactions with the more-than-human world. The whole text is permeated by a deep sense of (s)kinship with nature and other living beings. The sentiment expressed by Marcus in one of the exchanges is that of feeling safe and supported ("the whole natural world is watching over us" 22), while Kuppers writes about the "generosity" (21) of sand and natural landscapes, ready to welcome and support the lovers.

Similarly to the opening poem, other pieces also describe the alchemic transformations of the lovers' bodies. At times, the boundaries between the human and the more-than-human begin to blur, for instance, when Kuppers writes about skin becoming dust and dust becoming clay, or when a tallow candle allows bones to become "warmth" and "light" (21). Life forms become fluid and unconstrained, freely morphing one into another, with ultimate ease of movement and becoming.

The same vivacity is ascribed to the planet, as Kuppers writes about "the movement of Gaia" (21). Instead of static, disciplined, and objectified land that is owned and cultivated by its human inhabitants, Kuppers chooses to speak about the personified Gaia, full of agency and feeling, thus emphasising—in accordance with James Lovelock's famous Gaia Hypothesis—that all of us living beings on the planet "are parts of a greater whole" (Lovelock x).

For Kuppers and Marcus, Gaia becomes an ally but also a crucial participant in their crip intimacy. In their poetry, the boundaries between the lovers' bodies and the more-than-human world are dissolved, a dispersion that is presented as a source of strength and potential for increased intimacy. In the lines "If your hand does not move, / let the nerves of the air knit a web" or "if your back does not bend, / may the earth heave up to bring us close" (25), the elements are described as living creatures, possessing organic tissues ("nerves") and capable of purposeful (and supportive) action.

In the poem, mutual desire, but also the desire to engage in close contact with the elements and other living beings ("Imagine touching the belly of a snake. And the comfort of elephants" 22), transforms the lovers' bodies into landscapes ("wet clay land" 20), while they also become

travellers and explorers, "wayfarers" and "seafarers" on a journey full of joyful discoveries. Just as the more-than-human world acts on the lovers' bodies, so too the human lovers are attributed the capacity for action on a planetary scale: "our breaths travel the star distances, / molecules surf on the moisture between planets" (25). Experiencing the "tenderness" (25) of the living world, the lovers appear to expand infinitely.

The blurring of the boundaries between the lovers' bodies and the natural landscape can also be observed in the accompanying black-and-white photographs by Lisa Steichmann: the images represent Kuppers's and Marcus's naked bodies situated in green spaces, erotically entangled with each other, but also with plants, twigs, and soil. One of the photographs (27) shows a thicket of entangled limbs, naked hands and legs intertwined as densely as brambles. With the rest of the bodies left out of the frame, the naked limbs may not be immediately recognised as human body parts, resembling instead strange plants or animals. The bare skin appears to be painted in an intricate pattern by the sun shining through the leaves. Consequently, the natural landscape becomes not so much a setting but rather a participant in Kuppers and Marcus's loving encounters, as the boundaries between humans, plants, and soil constantly shift.

The photographs, as an integral part of the volume, provide a visual narrative which runs parallel to the textual layer, overlapping with the poetic representation of bodies *in* and *as* landscapes as well as reinforcing it. Though the photographer herself remains invisible, always positioned outside of the frame, her constant gaze becomes an important element of the lovers' encounter. Hers is not a distanced, nonpartisan perspective of a documentary maker, nor does she appear to uniquely prioritise the aesthetic aspect of the representation (although the latter element is obviously also significant, as the images present the beauty and serenity of human bodies held and protected by the landscape, exploring the affinities between various bodies with aesthetic precision reminiscent of Laura Aguilar's nature self-portraits)—instead, the focus is placed on relationality. Steichmann's biographical note at the end of the volume reveals that she is a friend of the couple; she also apparently shares her passion for water with Kuppers, and the two of them frequently swim together (121). As a result, the ecorelationality foregrounded in *Crippled Poetics* extends to the composition of the photographic material: the sunlit, airy spaces documented in the images encompass both the lovers and the photographer, who accompanies them in the green space, together with plants, soil, and rocks. In the biographical note, Steichmann declares that, as she worked on the photographic material for the volume, she was "delighted" by Kuppers and Marcus's "joy in each other and the friendship in the circle, the laughter, the hugs" (121), indicating that this broad frame

of relationality extends not only to the relationship between the couple and more-than-human participants but also to the affective and physical contact between the photographer and her subjects.

Steichmann's declaration that in her visual contribution, she portrays "this human touch and the depth of friendship" (121) draws attention to the significance of the word *touch*, which here evokes both associations with the erotic touch documented in the images and the human touch interpreted as a broader (eco)relational attitude assumed by the lovers in their approach to the surrounding environment and all other living beings. While Kuppers and Marcus's loving relationship obviously foregrounds their own emotional and erotic union, the joy of their coupling is meant to be shared, thus enhancing their (eco)relationality with the surrounding world, including not only the landscape, but also the photographer as well as the readers of the volume.

That both Kuppers and Marcus associate green, living landscapes with love and intimacy is evident, and the crucial role of imagination in this process is well exemplified by two poems inspired by a shared bed. Marcus describes it as a piece of furniture ("There are two beds in my room / One, the more recent is a hospital bed" 59). The speaker explains that he "hates its image in [his] mind" (59) due to all the connotations it evokes. The other bed, at some point considered an unnecessary item, is transformed once he begins to share it with his partner, and then its description changes as it is referred to as "[his] nest" (59).

Kuppers, in her poem, goes a step further, suggesting: "What if this world were a four-poster bed and we the seafarers on an adventure" (60). In *Cripple Poetics*, the room is transformed into an imaginary landscape full of beauty and promise. Importantly, the lovers actively form that landscape ("we excavate, mould, shape a new island, / we lick clay into shape" 60). The creation of the imaginary landscape for a scene of intimacy is presented as an erotic act in itself. The freedom seems infinite, with the lovers' bodies capable of fantastical transformation ("let's grow aqualungs" 60). Watery immersion, as a way of reimagining the landscape of the body, is a recurring motif in the entire volume.

FROM WATERSCAPES TO OTHERSPACE

While the photographic material included in *Cripple Poetics* concentrates on the lovers' bodies immersed in soil and greenery, some of the most important references to more-than-human spaces in the volume are to waterscapes. Watery spaces, with the freedom of movement that they offer and the joy of literal immersion in the more-than-human world, become

important allies for Kuppers, Marcus, and their intimacy, offering them a sense of independence and safety, in contrast to some more difficult land-bound experiences.

It is no coincidence that Kuppers juxtaposes her account of the unpleasant experience at a concert with a memory of Marcus and herself swimming and relishing the pleasure of "delicious drift":

> Neil floats in green water. . . We will ourselves to enter this different element and yet capture the freedom of water, where we both move without pain. There are moments of delicious drift. For seconds, we are at stillness, with held breath. Our muscular limbs darting down into the water are no longer awkward. Hope. (43)

In the passage above, it is evident that the waterscape allows the lovers to experience a transformation of their physical sensations and their mobility: movement is no longer awkward or painful; instead, their motions are quick, sure, and free, a source of intense pleasure. Kuppers expresses a similar sentiment in her article elaborating on the importance of swimming for the crip culture: "[while swimming,] I am mobile in ways I cannot be out of the water. Nothing straps me down, and I have the privilege of movement, sidewinder, undulating, rolling in the pleasure of my round strong limbs. In the water, pressure deforms" ("Swimming" 126).

On the one hand, this transformation can contribute to a heightened sense of self and enjoyment of one's body as it is. This is an important aspect of immersion in waterscapes for Marcus: "I can . . . fall. my body be itself. just who I am. me Spastic . . . falling. turning, twisting, writhing. its o.k. water" (qtd. in Kuppers, "Swimming" 127–28). On the other hand, it is also an opportunity to expand that sense of self and allow the boundaries to dissolve, thus opening up space for intimate encounters.

Both Kuppers and Marcus were among the active participants of the Salamander Project, using swimming as a means of exploring "the wild aesthetic of water," with the participants seeking to "deform [them]selves through sleek unhinged control" (Kuppers, "Swimming" 120). Essentially, the project stressed the potential of waterscapes as "edge zones" (ibid.), encouraging unrestricted exploration and readiness to redefine one's sense of physicality and movement.

Significantly, this redefinition is associated with openness to blurring the boundaries between human and nonhuman embodiment. As Kuppers and her collaborators put it, "[i]n water, otherspace can make us imagine manatees and otters, fantasies of non-realist embodiment give us gills, and knit new sensations into our skins" (Kuppers et al. 40). The swimmers' descriptions of their experience in the water is frequently expressed

through identification with more-than-humans (in Kuppers's words: "In the water, I am salamander," "Swimming" 126). By becoming the other, the participants were not only able to develop increased sensitivity to the living world, but also to let go of their predetermined notions of the available modes of moving, feeling, touching, and being touched, recognising (and revelling in) ecorelational pleasure.

Through their awareness of "water and flesh as connective media" (Kuppers, "Swimming" 124), the swimmers in the Salamander Project were encouraged to consciously experience "being touched by elements and penetrated by our shared world" (122). The references to touch and penetration present in this description, with their potential erotic connotations, suggest that the Salamander Project advances both perspectives at once: posthuman and ecosexual.

In *Cripple Poetics*, the authors' shared experience of watery immersion as entering "otherspace," in which embodiments and identities become fluid and species boundaries can become permeable, appears to seep directly into their poetic language, full of more-than-human affinities and identifications. "I am salmon," declares the speaker in one of Marcus's contributions (38). In another poem, contributed by Kuppers ("Velvet green embraces as we sink. . ."), wet skin becomes "a link to a Jurassic age" (62), as if swimming was allowing the lovers to regress to earlier forms of evolution, erasing accumulated baggage and blurring the distinctions between more-than-human lifeforms. It is clear that for the speaker in the poem, immersion in water is a way of making kin with other living beings:

> cool, fellow feeling
> drowned in the wet face world of strangers
> touch, sink, nip and touch again,
> asserting companionship. (62)

Significantly, it is through touch—its significance marked by repetition in the fragment quoted above—that "the world of strangers" is familiarised and becomes a space of "companionship."

When the lovers move away from each other in the water, their movements are indicative of freedom and enjoyment: one person "sails into the green growth" (62), while the other "cartwheels to the lily pads" (62). The pleasure they obviously experience is linked to the ease with which their bodies can move, but it is also ecorelational: the vegetation with which they interact is velvety, welcoming, and companionable. The erotic undertone of the situation culminates in the final line of the poem, as "an inelegant kiss opens the flower" (62). The ambiguous meaning of the "flower" in that line encompasses both the lilies in the pad and the speaker's body, ecosexually

linking physical contact with the more-than-human world and erotic pleasure. The image of an opening flower suggests letting go of constraints and inhibitions, which is further enhanced by the description of the kiss as "inelegant," celebrating its imperfection and rawness.

In the poem, the speaker and her lover allow their bodies to become transformed by the waterscape, and the celebration of biodiversity and multispecies kinships becomes an essential part of their shared intimacy and erotic enjoyment. The same elements also influence the textual landscape of the volume.

INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS IN THE LANDSCAPE OF THE TEXT

In his article on the links between landscape and literature, Gareth Doherty argues that, in fact, "the writer and landscape architect use similar tools" (39)—both making matter consolidate into a desired shape. Another claim made by the landscape scholar is, however, more problematic. According to Doherty, in contrast to landscape, "literature privileges the word and not the visual or sensual" (38). In this section, I would like to suggest that in her contributions to the volume, Kuppers actually draws from her affinity with water and intimate closeness experienced in waterscapes, and allows these sensations to inspire a very sensual landscaping of her poetry.

This is exemplified by the poem "Swimming in the figure eight. . .," where Kuppers reimagines her first meeting with Marcus by setting it in a waterscape, reflected in the form of the poem. The meeting scene and the first touch between the future lovers is described in realistic terms, but their movement is already expressed in language suggestive of swimming: "sinking down onto the floor together" and "moving [their] arms together" (14). The rest of the poem meanders like a river and becomes reminiscent of undulating seaweed as the movement of arms smoothly morphs into "Kelp flow" (14). The text seems to dance on the page as the spaces between individual words and letters expand and fluctuate. The reimagination of the floor as a waterscape thus facilitates freedom of movement, underscored by evocative images of otters and jellyfish.

The weightlessness of the jellyfish, described as "colored puff-balls" (14), is immediately linked to "ballet" (14), evoking both the festive feeling of a ballroom and ballet as the most physically demanding form of dance, requiring exceptional physical strength and flexibility. Seemingly, the poetic transformation of the realistic setting (the floor in a university space in Michigan) into an imagined waterscape replaces the heaviness and gravity that makes the bodies "sink" with joyful freedom of movement.

Kupper's playful breaking of the line with "in / visible creatures" (14) draws the reader's attention to the duality of the image: the two dancers are "visible" and "invisible" creatures at the same time. As much as they are visible as performers dancing in front of an audience, there is also the invisible dance playing out against an imaginary, fluid landscape. The final lines of the poem, referring to "the inference of watching" (14), seem to indicate the inaccessibility of the latter dimension to the onlookers, as it becomes a private experience reserved for the two dancers.

Moreover, "watching" highlights the strong presence of visual imagery with mentions of "silver" otter coat, "colored" jellyfish, and "rainbow light" (14), indicating a heightened sensuality of the imagined watery space. As a result, the poem feels almost glittery—an impression enhanced by the serpentine, liquid line of words on the page, as if individual words could change their place any time, swimming this way or that, creating new meanings and associations, celebrating the freedom of movement.

Another great example of textual landscaping is the poem "Alchemy," which invites readerly exploration in a circular manner, starting from the top, or, alternatively, from the bottom. Consistent with the title, the four "corners" correspond to the four elements with apostrophes "remember earth," "remember air," "remember fire," "remember water" (8), evoking the magical, transformative properties attributed to these forces of nature by ancient and medieval alchemists. Kuppers, notably, associates these elements with the body: earth with the flesh, air with breath, fire with laughter, and water with "hot blood" (8).

As a result, the boundaries between the body and the more-than-human world become blurred, and the resulting ecorelational pleasure is heightened by various sensory experiences evoked in the text: delighting the sight with a "bejeweled branch," touching the "softness of the flesh, and the "tremor of . . . heaving life," hearing "the breath whistle" (8). Contrary to Doherty's view that "visual or sensual" aspects are secondary in literature, the poem exudes lightness and buoyancy, its shape reminiscent of a water bubble through the poet's deft use of blank space on the page.

Read from the top, the last word of the poem is "flow," and the lack of a full stop at the end of the sentence (in contrast with the other sentence of the poem, which follows standard punctuation rules) prompts the reader not to stop here and continue with the circular motion, allowing the words to keep spinning. The poem is also accompanied by a photograph by Steichmann, which shows Kuppers's and Marcus's naked bodies joined in a loving embrace. With their knees bent and their backs curled, lying on the ground among green ferns, the lovers form a quasi-circular shape, which corresponds with the form of the poem. The mirroring effect enhances the impression of sensuality and dynamism achieved in the text.

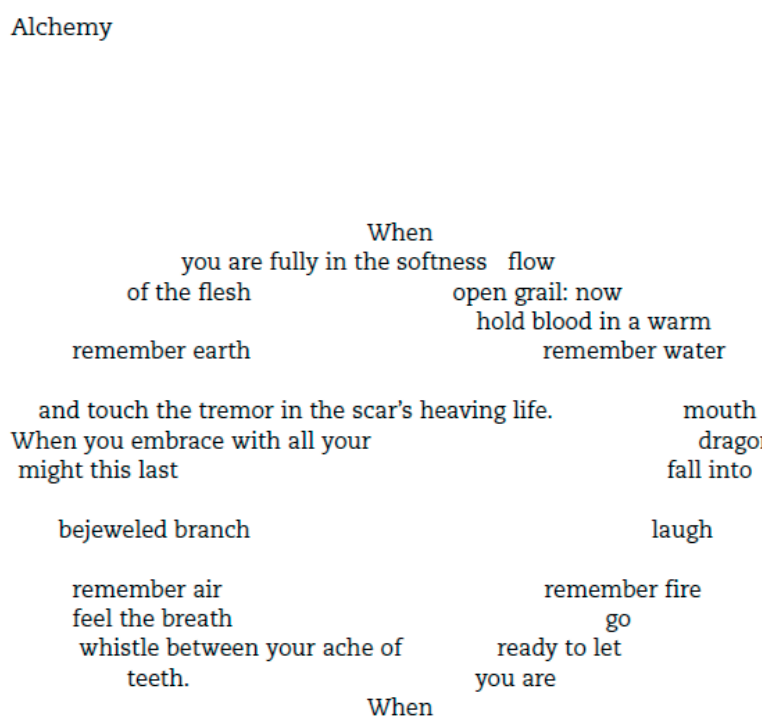

Fig. 1. Petra Kuppers and Neil Marcus, "Alchemy," *Cripple Poetics: A Love Story*, Homofactus, 2008, p. 8. © 2008 by Petra Kuppers and Neil Marcus. Reprinted with the permission of copyright holder.

In *Cripple Poetics*, the authors explore a whole range of possibilities to be found in "landscaping" the words on the page—the airiness, ease, and movement of "Alchemy," for instance, can be contrasted with the firm wall of Marcus's "love yous" covering an entire page (67) further in the volume. The resulting impression of the reliability and permanence of his affection for his partner stems not so much from the number of repetitions, but rather from the visual effect, causing the words to resemble bricks or stones in a durable structure.

But perhaps the most significant visual aspect of the volume is the authors' choice to use different fonts for poems and other exchanges, as well as for the two contributors, and their decision not to standardise spelling and punctuation through normative proofreading. As a result, the authors' physicality, including their particular mobility and its impact on their typing capabilities, is inscribed onto the landscape of the text, shaping its texture, while also influencing the pace and pathways of the

reader's journey. In this respect, *Cripple Poetics* transcends the tradition of concrete poetry, which it evokes through its iconicity and foregrounding of visual experience, as the typography becomes almost an extension of the authors' modes of mobility and embodiment. The different rhythms and paces of Kuppers's and Marcus's typed contributions complement the photographs documenting their embraces and physical closeness, which adds to the impression of sensuality and authenticity conveyed by the text. The words on the page undulate and dance, but sometimes also halt or stumble, creating a sense of living, varied landscape in which the two lovers not only meet each other, but also undergo alchemical transformations, morph into different lifeforms, and connect with the more-than-human world on multiple levels, allowing their ecorelational pleasure to sustain and enhance their mutual connection. Consequently, the textual landscape does not feel disciplined or terraformed, but rather lovingly shaped through leaning into natural rhythms and patterns with their joyful unpredictability and authentic imperfection. The resulting landscape of the text is, actually, deeply visual *and* sensual, not only documenting the authors' crip intimacy, but also inviting the reader to engage in an intimate encounter with the words on the page.

CONCLUSION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF LANDSCAPED INTIMACIES

Cripple Poetics can be viewed as a piece that draws on the rich tradition of landscape love poetry and subverts it to establish new modes of crip intimacy. Rather than employing the patriarchal imagery of terraforming, penetration, and conquest, Kuppers and Marcus describe both physical and imaginary landscapes that become *otherspace*, fostering more-than-human relationality and crip-queer couplings. Erotic pleasure in the collection is drawn from both physical encounters with natural landscapes (as evidenced by the accompanying photographs) and the lovers' bodies. Immersion in different kinds of landscapes (textured greenery, water) is not only a source of pleasant sensory experience, but also an opportunity to explore different modes of mobility and physical contact. The lovers' bodies undergo various transformations, both physically, impacted by embodied ecorelationality (for instance, when the sun paints their skin in various patterns), and by landscaping imaginary spaces through poetic imagery.

The resulting freedom of movement, touch, and embodiment finds its iconic representation in the way Kuppers and Marcus shape the landscape of the text. Their effective use of varied fonts allows them to register free

movement across different genres as well as reflect ecorelational pleasure and fluidity of feeling and embodiment within individual pieces. The preservation of spelling irregularities indicative of restricted mobility is paired with creative spellings suggestive of unlimited freedom of creativity and imagination, which invites reflection on diversity and normativity, and their links with dominant notions of pleasure and intimacy. Consequently, by combining three different layers of landscaping—bodies *in* (physical and imaginary) landscapes, bodies *as* landscapes, and textual landscapes—Kuppers and Marcus shape a textual and conceptual environment that fosters intimacy and crip sexuality.

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