

Editorial Creative Writing and Arts

Eco-Crip Cultures: Disability and the Environment

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In the video “In My Language” (2007), Mel Baggs first communicates in a language of humming, hand movements, and touch directed toward the objects of their home, and later uses a speech-assisting device to translate these earlier scenes for viewers. The act of translation itself functions as a critique of normative, logocentric conceptions of language, challenging ableist assumptions that personhood and agency depend upon compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer) and ablemindedness. Anticipating viewers who assume that communication must be symbolic and designed for interpretation, Baggs explains that, in reality, “[their language] is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment, reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings.”

As I watch the first part of the video, enchanted by the recursive melodies produced through breath, movement, touch, and repeated engagements with the surrounding environment, I find myself swaying in my chair, left and right, in unison with Baggs. I also notice myself softly gliding the pads of my fingers across my lips, left to right and back again, repeating what for me is a familiar gesture of sensory regulation. Mel’s language finds a home within my own bodymind. Mel’s dance continues in me. When Baggs returns in the second part of the video to the interaction between their hand and the water flowing from a bathroom faucet, they clarify that the encounter resists being reduced to an abstract representation awaiting codification: “I am just interacting with the water as the water interacts with me.” Situated in the present moment, the encounter changes both bodies and produces a new relation, as the hand redirects the flow of water and the water reshapes the hand’s sensory experience. Meaning-making thus emerges through intimate, participatory processes of reciprocal transformation and co-becoming.

Following Baggs from the video to their [blog](#), I lingered over a photograph of their cat Fey and soon found myself immersed in every post dedicated to her, and to cats more generally, for what could have been an hour or four. I lost track of time. Somewhere between a photograph and an affectionate account of mutual care and companionship, I stumbled upon the following passage from a poem (Baggs):

There is no joy greater than the purring of a cat
(No not *a* cat. *This* cat. Cats are not interchangeable.)
There is no joy greater than the purring of this cat
When she curls around my heart and purrs
And I purr my silent purr back.

I savored the resonance of these verses and the unexpected gift they offered. As I paused to breathe in these words, I lifted my gaze and found all three of my cat companions gathered in the room with me. Each had settled in a different place, and each place communicated something about them. One observed from a high vantage point, as she always does. Another rested in a wicker basket I had recently made for them, soaking in the sunlight while never straying too far from me (just as I would never stray too far away from him). The third remained tucked inside a hiding place, where he could rest undisturbed, participating through proximity without any expectation of direct interaction. In the middle of the night, still half asleep and with my eyes closed, I can tell who has chosen to sleep beside me through the distinct rhythm of their purr. Frequency, cadence, duration, pauses between breaths. *This* cat, not *a* cat.

Baggs's poem gestures toward a politics of specificity, of attunement and presence, that permeates eco-crip thought. The distance between *this* and *a* is the distance between encounter and categorization. Diagnostic labels, species classifications, environmental designations, and other taxonomic frameworks flatten situated lives into abstractions. *This* disabled person, though, does not squarely fit *a* diagnostic category. And *this* disabled person does not require fixing.

Yet the compulsion to drive living beings and ecosystems to the point of exhaustion is a defining feature of contemporary life. Capitalist temporalities prioritize efficiency, optimization, and linear notions of progress. Bodies that do not conform to dominant ideals of "humanity" become sites of correction, the same way damaged landscapes become sites of restoration. Both are governed by a drive toward an imagined state of wholeness and functionality, such that cure, rehabilitation, or conservation discourse, come to frame diverse forms of embodiment and ecological life as a problem requiring intervention. The desired outcome is a return to an idealized state of integrity, often at the expense of the "emergent ecologies" (Kirksey) that arise through adaptive strategies of survival. According to the same logic, training, domestication, and behavioral modification are routinely framed as forms of care, yet they reveal how deeply assumptions of discipline, compliance, and social acceptability structure relationships with more-than-human beings while constraining their agency and self-determination. If some ways of moving, communicating, relating, sensing, and inhabiting the world are elevated as desirable, others are contained, pathologized, excluded, or rendered disposable. Corporeal differences among humans and across species are discursively constructed as monstrous, deviant, bizarre, abnormal, and unnatural (Clare), drawing upon ableist rhetorics historically deployed against disabled people, queer

communities, non-western ways of living, and more-than-human animals alike. Eco-crip thought therefore directs attention toward the systemic production of disablement, from structural ableism and institutional othering to environmental destruction, which Sunaura Taylor describes as “a story of disablement” (5). Such systems are ultimately unsustainable, not only socially and politically but also in the fullest ecological sense.

Bridging ecological justice and crip politics, the contributions gathered in the arts section engage directly with crip time (Kafer; Chazan), exploring not only how illness, disability, chronic exhaustion, and care work reorganize temporal experience, but also how divergent embodied and sensory experiences give space for creative expansiveness. The necessity of slowing down becomes a critique of capitalist imperatives of productivity, constant availability, and extractive labor, resonating with Tricia Hersey’s call for a politics of rest rooted in resistance to white supremacy and grind culture (2022). Across poetry, experimental nonfiction, autotheory, speculative fiction, visual art, installation, photography, and multimedia practice, the common thread lies in cultivating situated relations with agential beings whose singular histories resist abstraction, and in practicing care-full attentiveness as an ethical stance grounded in specificity and a commitment to collective flourishing. *This* river, not *a* river. *This* beetle, not *a* beetle. Through crip drifting, poetic noticing, sensory immersion, and interspecies companionship, each piece contributes to the formation of “cripistemologies” (Johnson and McRuer), generating forms of knowledge grounded in the wisdom of crip experience and its sensory, affective, and somatic ways of tuning into the vibrant animacy of multispecies ecologies.

The section opens in the desert with Naomi Ortiz, the author of *Rituals for Climate Change: A Crip Struggle for Ecojustice* (2023) and the co-editor of the anthology *Every Place on the Map Is Disabled* (2026). What dominant ways of seeing dismiss as empty space, Ortiz reveals as a densely populated world. From a wheelchair-accessible table, Ortiz observes with awe and wonder a black-speckled bee, saguaros, Gila woodpeckers, and a ground squirrel emerging from beneath a nopal. “This is important,” Ortiz writes, reminding readers to pause and notice. Alternating fluidly between immersive observations and critical reflections on AI infrastructures and surveillance economies, Ortiz brings the intimate and the systemic into the same field of attention. Instead of recreating “birds and flowers in zeros and ones,” Ortiz proposes to privilege embodied attention over universalizing modes of knowledge production. “Not to know all but just some” thus becomes a declaration of presence, rooted in the recognition that knowing occurs through relationship, a slow and patient process that deepens through engaged encounter and can never be substituted by artificially generated approximations.

Questions of attention continue through Petra Kuppers’ visual essay. A disability culture activist, writer, community performance artist, and author of *Eco Soma: Pain and Joy in Speculative Performance Encounters* (2022), Kuppers brings visual art, speculative writing, movement, and environmental practice into conversation. In sustained relation with the Huron River, she develops crip drifting

as a method of “touching, being-with, sensing in a world that is likewise disabled, compromised, thriving in complexity.” The river becomes a site where embodied experience and digital infrastructures converge, holding together the contradictory realities of being a place of nourishment, to which Kuppers repeatedly returns, and the development of a data center along its banks. Kuppers experiments with prompts such as “disable the river,” applied to her own painting of the Huron River and fed into generative AI systems to “track surrealist disability/AI crossings.” The resulting images reveal how algorithmic imaginaries continue to associate disability with burden and obstruction. Yet these stigmatizing framings coexist with representations that Kuppers reads as “enabling.” The water may vanish from view, but only to nourish the landscape from underground, making room for lush vegetation in a gesture of lively exchange. Asking, “How can we take (back/on/forward) the modes of image production in an AI age?”, Kuppers responds by offering an application of her own eco soma method, which emerges through a commitment to staying with contradiction. As she writes, “understanding how AI works and making conscious decisions around it while it poisons our rivers and warms our environment” becomes part of that practice.

Water returns in Stephanie Heit’s “Fake Lake Intimacies,” this time filtered through madness, memory, contamination, and grief. Author of *Psych Murders* (2022) and *The Color She Gave Gravity* (Operating System, 2017), Heit identifies as a queer disabled poet, dancer, and teacher of somatic writing and contemplative movement practices. Part of a larger project dedicated to the development of a mad ecopoetics, the contribution stays with toxicity, contamination, disorder, and climate disaster as forms of “generative friction,” opening possibilities for “new ways to tend and be with and even love each other.” Looking out from her therapist’s office across Ford Lake, she finds a landscape that is simultaneously reservoir, ecological wound, place of attachment, and companion in reflection. The lake becomes a site “lubricated by water that swirls with its own histories and brokenness.” Refusing restorative fantasies, Heit attends to the persistent realities of damaged worlds: “I want the dam to break,” she writes, expressing a longing for riverine currents freed from human constriction and disabling intervention. Altered bodyminds and waterways coexist in solidarity, ultimately revealing disability and environmental change as intertwined forms of ongoing adaptation.

Questions of adaptation persist in Gaelle Chassery’s meditation on chronic illness, sensory art, and multispecies companionship. Focusing on the tending of inner, outer, and in-between environments while living with long-term and invisible disabilities, Chassery moves fluidly through these landscapes, seamlessly weaving together prose, poetry, and sensory installations. Writing and creating from a remote rural area while navigating chronic illness, limited support, and periods of being housebound, she challenges the fiction that sustainability can be detached from bodily capacity. Through vulnerable accounts of lived experience, Chassery transforms personal practice into a shared resource, assembling a repertoire of strategies through which readers might navigate fluctuating conditions of their own.

What emerges is a crip ethics of sustainability grounded in attentiveness to boundaries, the preservation of energies, wintering, and resets, as ecological care practices. Such practices may begin, as Chassery writes, with “observing animals as kindred spirits and companions who inhabit my surroundings, [such that] I never feel alone.” They may also take the form of nesting, which recurs throughout the essay as both practice and philosophy. Observing a swan building a nest becomes an occasion for rethinking sanctuary, pacing, buffering, and recuperation. “Our physical body is our primary nest after all,” she writes, collapsing distinctions between ecology and embodiment. These concerns extend into her sensory sculptures and textile environments, where sheeps remain present through the material traces of their lives. Wool carries memories, lanolin provides an anchoring sensory presence, and the paths sheeps trace across fields reappear in the lines and grooves of blankets and shawls.

Moving from sustainability and care to resource extraction and capitalist production, and then returning to relational care, Alex Dolores Salerno’s *A Refusal to Abandon* places coffee at the center of both inquiry and artistic practice. Combining a theoretical essay with photographs from the ongoing installation *semilla santa* (holy seed), most recently exhibited in [IN PROTEST AND IN CARE](#) at O-Overgaden, Salerno conceives of coffee as ritual, colonial infrastructure, commodity, and plant ally. Retracing the production chain from cup to farm, they connect environmental degradation, labor, disability, and colonial histories through an embodied ecological lens (“My bodymind is nature itself, as is yours”). In a world sustained by endless productivity, echoing the critiques of capitalist temporality articulated by Jonathan Crary (2013), Salerno reimagines coffee from a substance mobilized in the service of functionality and performativity to a “material steeped in climate crisis” approached through “the tenderness of familial connection, and the queer-crip undoing of 24/7 society’s demands.” This transformation takes material form in *semilla santa*. Chains of coffee beans become rosaries, tactile companions, and objects of contemplation, while their assembly is “deeply rooted in neurodivergent experience and stimulating through its repetition and tactility.” Visitors are invited to move through, hold, and feel the chains of coffee beans, encountering what Salerno defines “the invisibilized product” through sustained attention. Drawing on Sunaura Taylor’s call for “a refusal to abandon those people and landscapes that have been harmed” (25), Salerno ultimately moves from the ethics and politics of coffee production and consumption toward an eco-crip politics of care and collective survival: “Perhaps it’s the disabled experience of being left behind (during climate disaster, socially, economically, or otherwise) that primes us for an Eco-Crip revolution, or in other words, the refusal to abandon.”

A similar refusal to submit to capitalist standards of productivity emerges in Sarah Hopfinger’s contribution, which follows chronic pain and the unexpected companion found in a beetle (not just *any* beetle, but *the* beetle of *this* story). An award-winning queer disabled artist and researcher working across live art, dance, choreography, ecology, and crip practice, Hopfinger describes having “accepted” both

chronic pain and the slow mornings her body requires, while continuing to struggle against internalized narratives of productivity that leave her feeling “unproductive, useless, inefficient, not-a-proper-person.” The contribution’s turning point arrives roughly two-thirds down a Scottish hillside, where, pausing to tie a shoelace and gather energy before continuing, she encounters who is likely a violet ground beetle. Remaining “close to the ground,” she watches the insect stumble, pause, climb, fall, rest, and continue. The beetle offers no streamlined trajectory and no promise of optimization. Instead, *this* tiny creature, with their almost “prehistoric” appearance, advances through detours, hesitations, interruptions, and repetitions. What begins as observation gradually becomes companionship expressed through the language of affection. “I loved this beetle,” Hopfinger confesses, recognizing how it finds its way “not despite its messy movements, but because of them.” The encounter becomes an invitation to rethink her own embodiment, as the beetle’s way of moving through the world offers an alternative vision of movement and worth: “What if my chaotic body—its inefficiency—is a good way of moving through the world?” Through intimacy and shared vulnerability, the encounter thus develops into a form of affective solidarity grounded in experimental adaptation and, perhaps even more beautifully, crip joy.

Leaving behind the beetle’s trails, we enter the sensory worlds of gliders in Lena M. Schlegel’s poem, which attends to nocturnal creatures whose lives invite forms of sensing that exceed visual dominance and anthropocentric assumptions about perception and lived experience. Emerging from fieldwork in southeast Australia’s dwindling forests, the contribution accompanies a collaborative research article published in the general section of this issue (330-334), in which Schlegel and her co-authors develop the method of sensorigraphic attunement. The poem becomes a sensorigraphic practice in its own right, reaching toward elusive sensory impressions and cultivating receptivity to them. Situated within Australian forests threatened by extraction, wildfire, and climate change, the poem explores the grief accompanying ecological disablement, produced through “the slow violence of neglect” and felt in the “Ghosts of extinction / Haunting dead coupes,” where “Lineages broken / Renewal suppressed” bear witness to disrupted intergenerational ties and threatened futures. Yet the poem refuses to settle on grief as its final horizon. Through gliders, injured forests, and multispecies crip temporalities, it ends with a gesture that animates much of the section as a whole: “But while shadows of shimmer remain / We can’t help but knot ties.” The two lines point toward forms of kinship that endure from within environmental degradation, binding humans and more-than-human worlds together in shared practices of mutual support. In doing so, Schlegel extends the eco-crip refusal of abandonment articulated by Alex Dolores Salerno, grounding it in sensory expansiveness and multispecies entanglements of resistance.

From nocturnal forest worlds we move into a submerged forest landscape with Molly Wickett’s sculptural installation *All Day, Waiting for Another Sun to Rise*. Drawn to crip futurity, Wickett’s artistic practice explores how “disabled experiences can expand or subvert” normative temporal orders (Wickett). Through forged fungal

forms, oxidized surfaces, gravity, texture, scale, and the bodily experience of moving through the installation, the dystopian setting foregrounds a multisensory encounter with a world “that continues after what should have been a world-ending event.” As viewers move among the sculptures, deep time and future converge: the present expands to hold an imagined future while simultaneously carrying the sediment of previous world endings. Rather than restoring a lost past, the installation engages in speculative world-building, lingering with transformation and with the possibilities for continued life to emerge within altered worlds.

The section closes with a fictional short story by Lorraine Boissoneault, author of *Body Weather: Notes on Chronic Illness* (2026), a book on the interconnected relationships between human bodies and Earth’s meteorological systems. Returning to watery kinships and ecological transformation, “The Lake Erie Sisters” reaches toward futurity and mythic traditions while remaining within the speculative terrain opened by Molly Wickett’s installation. Set beside a lake troubled by shifting ecologies and an unseasonably warm December, the story follows three sisters and, from the perspective of the youngest, renders interoception through sensory textures, giving readers an embodied experience of palpitations dismissed as harmless by those around her. Her meeting with a monster whose body is encrusted with zebra mussels sets in motion a series of exchanges between damaged bodies and damaged ecologies, in which an index finger is traded for relief from relentless cardiac symptoms, a sister’s sight is given for the recovery of a companion animal, and other bargains follow. Cure here acts by moving the lake’s harm into the bodies of those who seek repair, thus exposing the promise of a return to wholeness as a redistribution of burden. By unsettling distinctions between harmless and harmful, native and non-native, ordinary and monstrous, the story exchanges restoration for newly negotiated forms of kinship and interdependence.

Kinship finds visual expression in the issue’s cover image by Emery Vanderburgh, weaving a thread that runs throughout the contributions and bringing the issue full circle. The artist refers to her work as “a love letter to disability” (Vanderburgh), an affective commitment reflected in the cover image, which belongs to her *Kin* series and the ongoing research-creation project *Floral Fasciation*. Created from fasciated flowers collected or cultivated by the artist, the project approaches mutation not as deviation from a normative ideal but as a generative expression of biodiversity that rejects the logic of uniformity. Arranged against a black background, a constellation of fasciated flowers gathers in community. Each bloom unfolds in its own form, at once distinct yet held in relation, with petals twisting, clustering, and unfurling in different directions. By celebrating the aesthetic qualities of plant mutation, Vanderburgh invites us to understand disability as a dynamic mode of living that foregrounds adaptive flourishing.

In the introduction to Shayda Kafai’s *Crip Kinship* (2021), a book I continue to absorb with crip time, care does not stand apart from knowledge production but belongs to it. For Kafai, “care might refer to honoring your tangible bodymind needs: closing your eyes, stretching, breaking to eat, or acknowledging the rise of feelings

and pausing to cry. Move and process as you need to, dear reader. May it launch you toward cultivating the soil and the seedlings of your own liberatory future” (27). With the same tending care, I wish for this invitation to accompany your reading of the creative contributions gathered in this special issue. May you move through them at your own pace, lingering where needed, returning when necessary, and carrying forward the eco-crip practices they cultivate.

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