

# Summary of AANM Discussion Session #6: Crip Technoscience Panel

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This discussion occurred on Tuesday, Sept 24, 2024 at 7 PM CST. Three presenters (Erika Jean Lincoln, Kelly Fritsch and moira williams) spoke about their projects and then there was some time for discussion. In total there were about 9 participants, including AANM's Jenel Shaw and Sacha Kopelow.

Jenel opened the evening with a land acknowledgement emphasizing that disability justice must be intersectional and all people have the right to be part of arts and culture. Then she introduced the panelists:

**Erika Jean Lincoln** (she/her) – An artist who works in new media and disability art, examining “the complex coupling of technologies and neurodivergence”, Erika is a graduate of the University of Manitoba (BA/BFA). She has had exhibits at The Hole (NYC), Science Gallery (Ireland), Boston Cyberarts Gallery (USA), The Bauhaus-Archiv (Germany), Winnipeg Art Gallery—Qaumajuq, and more. She has collaborated with neuroscientists and software engineers, and co-facilitated seminars with disability arts activists and scholars.

**Kelly Fritsch** (she/her) – Kelly is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University in Ottawa, on unceded Algonquin Territory. Her work focuses on “transforming the ableist social relations that structurally exclude and oppress disabled people”. She is the co-author of *We Move Together*, a children's book about ableism, accessibility and disability culture. She is the co-editor of *Disability Injustice: Confronting Criminalization in Canada* and *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*. At the time of this discussion, she was working on *A Broken Politics for a Disabled World*, a now-forthcoming book about how disability justice and crip culture can expand possibilities for disabled people, ecologies, and kin.

**moira williams** (they/them) – moira is an Indigenous disabled artist, disability cultural activist, access doula, curator and dreamer. They believe in and initiate everyday magic, ancestor time, ecological intimacies and access as art and celebratory crip resistance, imagining ecological intimacy as an expansion of Mia Mingus's idea of “access intimacy”. Their works hope to open up ways of thinking that include body, mind, spirit, and multispecies and mutual empathy as we break away from colonial technologies and ableism.

Each of these presenters spoke in turn, with Erika facilitating the evening. They all began with a visual description of themselves.

## Presentations

### Erika Jean Lincoln: Crip Technoscience as Art Practice

After her visual description of herself, Erika explained her green Zoom background that had the text “Sososo up for chatting and hanging!” She and Jenel helped participants learn how to download and install a green (want to share), red (shy) or yellow (in between) background, a form of “participation card” used by many neurodivergent communities. No one else used the background colours in the session, but Erika kept hers.

Erika discussed what “crip technoscience” meant to her, based on her reading of the *Crip Technoscience Manifesto* (which was co-authored by Kelly Fritsch)<sup>1</sup>. A slide contained the quote:

“... we center technoscientific activism and critical design practices that foster disability justice”

According to Erika’s interpretation, instead of looking at crip technoscience as a “high tech” thing involving scientists and medical doctors trying to “fix” disability or “mold” it to be a certain way, this manifesto talks about how we as disabled artists/beings are our own “knowledge-knowers” who critique, alter and reinvent our “material-discursive world”, that is, the physical world and how we use language to talk about our world.

Erika asked the question: “How can crip technoscience be integrated into one’s art practice?” One answer was: “To make art about our lives with the material realities of our lives.” She showed photos of art by two people:

- 1) **Chanika Svetvilas** has an interdisciplinary art practice that focuses on the diversity of the lived experience of mental health difference and the impact and stigma of inequality and access to care. The piece that Erika showed was of an orange pill bottle being pierced by multiple nails.
- 2) **Ruth Tabancay** has had to come to terms with her use of medical plastics, which she knows contribute to global warming and therefore destruction of coral reefs. Erika showed a picture of a “coral reef” sculpture Ruth had constructed from yarn, household and medical plastic waste, polystyrene, canvas and pins.

Another way of criping an art practice was “to express different aesthetics of making/doing”. Here Erika showed pictures of two examples:

- 1) **Kinetic Light** is an internationally recognized disability art ensemble. The slide depicted a performance that involved 2 people in wheelchairs suspended from the ceiling against a green screen, a “very athletic” and “groundbreaking” piece of work.
- 2) **Sam Metz (UK)** created a piece called “Drawing as Stimming”, which shows the lines produced on a page due to involuntary tics from a Tourette’s neurological difference. The drawing practice produces a release for the artist.

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<sup>1</sup> Hamraie, A., & Fritsch, K. (2019). Crip technoscience manifesto. *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 5(1), 1-34.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332145090\\_Crip\\_Technoscience\\_Manifesto](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332145090_Crip_Technoscience_Manifesto)

## Kelly Fritsch: New Understandings of Organ Transplantation

Kelly's presentation was about a project called "Frictions of Futurity and Cure in Transplant Medicine: Re-Thinking Central Challenges Through Feminist/Crip Science and Technology Studies". The aim of the project, which she co-leads, is to understand organ transplantation experiences from a complex, nuanced, and layered perspective, drawing on crip technoscience and disability culture to create new knowledge. The project explores multiple points of view and multisensory experiences. She positioned this work as an alternative to the dominant narrative that transplant is a "cure" and that "it's the gift of life that someone has given you". The project involves ethnography (interviews, participant observation), narrative, and artistic research practices. The themes explored include what it means to experience organ failure, be a survivor, and adhere to complex medical regimens.

Kelly described the following parts of the project:

- Artist residencies and salons (talks, screenings, lectures, and discussions with experts, patients and community members) at Tangled Art + Disability, including:
  - Fraser Best, a documentary filmmaker who created work about his liver transplant experience
  - Lucille Atlookan, a visual artist who was on the waitlist for a kidney transplant and created a series of works exploring their experiences
- Crowd-sourced fieldnotes: Participants created artistic responses to what they were experiencing at public events, using provided art supplies. These were collected (with their permission) to serve as additional "field notes" for the researchers when making their interpretations of the data. According to Kelly, this "collectivization" of field note creation changes our perspective on "what counts as knowledge, who holds knowledge, and how knowledge is communicated".
- "Tangles" by professional graphic artist Sonny Bean: This image was created live to document the feelings in the room at their first salon in November 2022, which helped the virtual audience access the event more deeply. Kelly said: "It provides a stark contrast to biomedical discourses on transplant that imagine a distinct 'before' and 'after' transplant. The illustration's whimsical, spectacular, and twisting images defy linear senses of time. The image includes pools of water and tears that also emerged throughout our research findings, highlighting the grief that often accompanies embodied changes and intense medical events." It is being used for further scholarly engagement and being shared with stakeholders and the public.
- Digital storytelling with both transplant recipients and healthcare providers: By moving away from linear forms and clean resolution, this storytelling is able to explore the "challenges and tensions" the researchers are trying to understand, in a nuanced and layered way. It also allows for exploration of the ethics of care.
- Sensory ethnography interviews using cast making: Participants made tin foil "casts" of their hands, ripping, tearing apart, and modifying these with art materials. This gave them a chance to explore feelings like anger and loss, which often do not have space within the transplantation process. While some participants loved the brittle yet supple nature of the tin foil and how it did and did not mold to one's hand, others hated it.

- **Soundscape:** The project recorded sounds in various spaces such as the transplant ward, ICU, hallway, elevator and atrium where patients and their families met. The researchers felt that these sounds, such as clicks, beeps, and swishes from pumps or other machines that transplant recipients could not see, contributed to “confused states” that were often simply “written off as unreality rather than understood as experiential knowledge”. The researchers were surprised at how easily patients agreed to their request to record, leading Kelly to muse: “It became clear that our presence was just one of many hundreds of interactions in the acute phase of transplantation that are without sense or meaning to individuals.”
- **Art workshops with participants who have struggled with transplant complications:** Here Kelly showed an example of a piece of art by a middle-aged woman who had experienced 3 transplants. The picture was of cotton balls placed randomly across a white surface, held down by different colours of tape. In the center was a heart-shaped figure, and inside of that was a rectangle of black tape around white cotton marked by black dots. The woman said that the cotton puffs represented the support groups her life was organized around, and another participant noticed that the material suggested the pokes and needles she must have had to endure. Kelly talked about the nature of medical tape as a technology: simple and maybe even boring, but experienced differently by the practitioner who places it and the recipient who feels the gummy side against their skin. Medical tape facilitates healing of wounds, but Kelly also asked what else gets held down by its pressure. “What gets pushed below the surface in the name of the healing that needs to happen? What does the tape hide?”
- **Pop up galleries:** They have hosted two popup art galleries, both featuring pieces from *Transformations*, a series depicting butterflies made from discarded hospital fabrics (e.g. gowns, bed linens, scrubs) and pieces of canvas from “failed paintings” (works that were never sold or in shows). The artist, Dominic Quagliozzi, who is a double lung transplant recipient, chose the butterfly as a sign of hopeful transformation after noticing how the metamorphosis of a butterfly was a messy process, much like his transplant. He said the materials reflected the combination of “loss, movement, memory and place” that are part of transplantation and sickness experiences.

## **moira williams: Curating Crip’d Ecologies**

Moira spoke about their curatorial practice and, specifically, the show *Crip’d Ecologies: Unfurling Expanded Environments*<sup>2</sup>, which they co-curated with Jeremiah Barber, a non-disabled ally that they met during a residency.

Moira described how co-curating is about interdependence rather than independence, which goes against the “art ecosystem”. All three of the shows they’ve co-created have been with non-disabled allies in DIY art spaces, which they find better for accessibility because they are “always shifting and reshaping physically”, like disabled bodies. In such spaces there are likely to be people willing to make changes such as building a ramp.

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<sup>2</sup> More detailed information about the show can be found in the catalog, at: [https://issuu.com/rootdivision/docs/cripdecologies\\_catalog](https://issuu.com/rootdivision/docs/cripdecologies_catalog)

They reflected on how hard it was to get a show about “cripped ecologies” accepted somewhere, because they would get feedback like “What do disabled people know about the environment?” To them, even if not everyone can be outside, we all have an environment. Even in a built environment, the materials originally came from nature, making the space still “natural”.

Moira then showed examples from the show:

- 1) A show logo which was collectively made by participants in an accessibility affirmation workshop: In the workshop, they discussed crippling language, what accessibility is, its joys and frustrations, and what kinds of words, images and gestures it brought to mind. Participants created images which were risographed and shared, incorporated into the logo and displayed on a wooden shelf in the gallery. They even autographed each other’s images.
- 2) *Quarantine Day 980 (I Love You, Goodnight)* by Megan Bent: This was a triptych of the same image of the leaf of a checkered prayer plant. Superimposed on the leaf were the shadows of window panes and Megan’s outstretched arm signing “I Love You” in ASL. The piece represents Megan’s dying father’s COVID isolation unit and the number of times she said I love you to him through the windows. One part was the leaf with a chlorophyll print on it, another was a large colour photograph of it, and the third was a smaller tactile print (black and white). Moira found the piece “quiet and strong in all the ways that are just very poetic”, talking about how the cloth protecting the leaf from ultraviolet decay showed a “sensibility of care”, and that the piece “weaves a lot of things about decay of the body, the disabled body, the plants, the environment.”
- 3) *Along the Perimeter* by Darrin Martin: This was a 2-channel video from a live feed the artist set up in his back yard during COVID. Darrin showed it along with sound live DJ’d from his cochlear implants as a glass harp is played.
- 4) *Indigo Rising* by Leeza Doreian: This was a series of paintings of the artist’s favourite vintage shirt (blue fabric with a white grid and white round dots) scrunched up as if it is the moon in different phases.
- 5) *Chahta hymn* by Tricia Rainwater: In this video, the artist repeatedly says “Grandmother, you deserve healing” in Choctaw while surrounded by bundles of medicine (California sage) in a medicine wheel or cross shape. She is attempting to learn her ancestral language despite not being allowed to grow up with it, passing on healing from colonization and family abuse to her ancestor who had the same disability as she has.
- 6) *Love, Simeon* by Anuj Larvaidya: This work combined a poster for an imaginary movie with sound art and a workshop where participants acted out the film. The piece was about the quest for HIV meds, imagining a connection to a rhesus macaque in a primate testing facility. The film poster, which had pieces of lichen and kombucha scobies stuck to it, included a topless man holding pictures of monkeys, evoking “ecoporn”.
- 7) *Augmented Ink* by M Eifler: The artist, who is not able to get outside very much, creates shapes that they imagine, by layering hand drawing and printed photos of those drawings. Often they use different scientific or technical images, and the results almost look like clusters of gems, crystals or plants. Exhibit visitors also got the chance to make and play with these kinds of images, in a kind of “call and response” process.

- 8) *Rubble Grid* by A. Sef: This piece was a collection of urban debris, e.g. stone, plastic, brick, pottery, that audience members were encouraged to touch and rearrange. This allowed for a conversation about what is natural, what is built, what is beautiful, and the different sensory and tactile desires we have.
- 9) *crafting + casting a crip songspell for our resonant bodies + crip ecologies* by Alexa Dexa: In this hybrid workshop, people experimented with making sounds using objects, voices or bodies, which were collected on a computer and used to help build up a musical soundscore made live by Alexa. Moira showed a video of Anuj making noises with earplugs.
- 10) *moss time, crip time* by Cynthia Ling Lee: This was a commissioned dance film involving the artist in a costume that looked like moss, which she brought in for people to touch. The video played with text, sound and slow movement. When the dance films (from the multiple crip dancers in the show) were shown, the audience was encouraged to dance along, and they did, from their chairs and standing. “It was quite beautiful, and another way to think about access,” said moira.

As well as describing the art, moira talked about accessibility features of the gallery space, such as a variety of seating and the Invoking Aqueous Ancestors Chill ‘n’ Stim Tent. This was a multitone blue tent at the back of the space that contained soft objects such as rugs, weighted pillows, and a heating pad. It contained items that evoked the ocean, such as a seaweed wall and loose fabric on top of the roof that looked like squid, seaweed or algae. There was also “bling” such as shiny purple fringe (tinsel). Two wheelchairs could fit into it side by side, it could easily open and close, and it could change shape thanks to extra fabric. You could also touch the patches of cloth that made up the tent, and push on the ceiling with padded sticks, making the “sea life” move.

Cata Gomes, a Ramaytush elder, sang an opening and closing song, using a stick of elderberry as a musical instrument. Cata was also there to help center and hold the participants throughout the show, moira explained.

## Discussion

After the presentations, there was a discussion for approximately 15 minutes. While comments were positive overall, some challenging questions arose, particularly about language.

One participant expressed appreciation for the “really wonderful glimpses into all of these different worlds”. They were particularly impressed by how fluid and open the art works were between different mediums and sensory abilities. They wondered about the behind-the-scenes methodologies that went into bringing these projects together and breaking down barriers in the art world. In response, moira spoke about how important it is to keep in touch and establish artists’ access needs while reminding them of the curatorial vision. They also plugged the multisensory nature of their artwork currently at Tangled Art + Disability, mentioning a “vibro-bench” that was connected with their video.

Another participant said that they found the presentations very thought-provoking, but almost didn’t come because they were put off by the term “crip technoscience”. They themselves are not particularly interested in the details of how the tech they use works, e.g. their car is just a vehicle to

them. A lot of the art seemed to involve reclaiming “found objects” from artists’ lives and medical treatment. Why call this “crip technoscience”?

Kelly said that “crip technoscience” is a shorthand term for describing the larger political, cultural, social and economic implications of technologies that enable access and therefore change people’s experience of the world. They were interested in the new ways of being that get created in the interaction of the “nitty gritty of the human body” and the environment. The term was meant to spark the imagination to think about the world differently.

The participant wondered if they should be more openminded to those terms, but also countered by bringing up a new book called *Activist Affordances*, which seemed to use another term for what Kelly was describing. Kelly said that this book focuses more on individual practices rather than things that shape the world at a collective level, to which the participant replied, “But don’t you think that when we ask for affordances, for instance in our workplaces, we are shaping things for the collective?”

Moira said that often people “get scared off by the tech part”, but reminded participants that even things like making paper or sewing are technologies. In their show, there were a lot of different levels of technology, “that was so beautiful to see”. The works were in conversation with each other. Erika agreed with moira that there are so many things that we forget are technologies.

Erika thanked everyone who came and shared. Jenel said, “Thank you guys for closing out this discussion series with a bang. We’re hoping to continue these in the future. I think there’s been a really great response for it.” She commented that everyone who attended this session had a lot of research to do now.

Before the session ended, moira pointed out that the “participation cards” can be printed and blinged out to wear at places, e.g. neurodivergent community events, not just used as screen backgrounds.