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Zines as Crip Doulas

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DIY, Alternative Cultures & Society

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Abstract

This article establishes how liminality offers a route to understanding the zines in Wellcome Collection that connect to being, or becoming, disabled. After Stacey Park Milbern's notion of 'Crip Doulas', it explores how zines can support transitions into disability. Responding to the issue's focus on 'selfing' and 'shelving', this article discusses both: crip doulaing as forming disabled or crip identities, with zines acting as 'liminal affective technologies', and crip doulaing as supporting a coming to archives. Through a zine methodology, this article extends existing work on zines and identity construction and offers detailed reflections on the methodological and ethical considerations of research with Wellcome Collection's zines around health and disability.

Keywords

Zines, Crip, disability, liminality, archives

Introduction: Zines and liminality

This article draws from a wider piece of research where I demonstrate how zines, so often characterised as marginal, can equally productively be characterised as liminal. I applied this idea in my PhD research with the zines about health held by Wellcome Collection, a museum and library in London, UK. Wellcome's¹ zine collection has expanded from an initial interest in mental health perzines (or 'personal zines', broadly zines concerned with autobiography and life writing) to over 1300 zines which connect in diverse ways to Wellcome's wider remit of 'health and the human'. Many of these zines offer accounts of experiences of transition and in-betweenness which risk invisibility in a medical humanities which privileges narrative (Wasson, 2018; Woods, 2011): becoming (more) disabled; periods of diagnostic uncertainty or being in 'prognosis time' (Jain, 2007); chronic pain or illness; madness; dying; or gender transition.

Liminality, as a concept in anthropology developed by Glasgow-born Victor Turner, building on the work of ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, was used to denote the middle or in-between period of a social transition (Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1960). These in-between states had a set of qualities that Turner argued could be extrapolated from the Ndembu tribe of his fieldwork, who live in villages across

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what is now North West Zambia, to other social contexts. Facing the limits of Turner's colonial anthropological project in his account of in-betweenness necessitates turning to feminist, post-colonial, trans, queer and crip perspectives on the messy processes of social change, transition and transformation and the lived experience of being in-between. Rather than the carefully managed linear transition between two fixed states that Turner described, these offer a more generative theoretical framework for thinking through liminality in relation to zines (see, Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1990; Dentice and Dietert, 2015; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Rosaldo, 1989).

I am not the first zine scholar to offer in-betweenness as a way to think about zines: aside from various references to zines' strange location in-between things (forms of media, spaces, public and private), writer, artist and interdisciplinary feminist scholar Adela C. Licona (2012) has written of the 'third-space' or 'borderland' discourses produced by zines made by feminist, anti-racist zine makers of colour from the 1980s and 1990s, which she accessed primarily from the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and the Culture, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library at Duke University. A focus on liminality is not to dismiss the value of the margins: the margin continues to be a site intentionally occupied by zine makers, as well as a location ascribed to zine making practices, communities and zine collections, and we can understand the margins as a radical site of critique, politics and cultural production through the work done by Black feminist writers such as bell hooks (1989). Instead, I explore liminality as an addition to our repertoire: a different way of interrogating what zines are and do.

In this article, I demonstrate how liminality offers a route to understanding the zines in Wellcome's collection that connect to being, or becoming, disabled. After queer Korean-American disability activist Stacey Park Milbern's notion of a 'crip doula' (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018), I explore how zines doula the rites of passage of becoming disabled. Milbern's crip doula draws from a history of non-medical, community birthing, care at home and knowledge transmitted outside of formal institutions (National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.). Though originally used to describe women offering each other non-medical support during childbirth, 'doula' has since been expanded to describe non-medical support during other key life experiences, within reproductive health (like miscarriage or abortion) or outwith (like death).

In response to this issue's focus on 'selfing' and 'shelving', through a close reading of several zines, I specifically examine both: crip doulaing as forming disabled or crip identities, connecting this to the concept of 'liminal affective technologies' in social psychology, which involve 'the creation of liminal experiences in order to facilitate, accompany or engender relevant social transitions and associated personal transformations' (Stenner and Greco, 2018: 4), and crip doulaing as supporting and exploring coming to archives as a crip rite of passage. Zines as doulaing is particularly appealing in a context like Wellcome Collection which has historically privileged the records, objects and ephemera of medicine. There is something significant about doulaing as a non-medical birthing of disability in a context where the multiple transitions, rites of passages and life stages of disability are invisible in medical discourses, where disability can only be birthed by medicine.

Although disability cannot be abstracted from the experience of illness, injury and/or impairment, it also cannot be reduced to this. Becoming disabled is also about what it means to claim or be offered 'disabled' or 'crip' as an identity and how these identities are constituted or negotiated. As Fiona Robertson (2024) describes in her zine *Who Counts as Disabled?*: 'the disability justice movement uses self-declaration as the fundamental determinant of "who is disabled?"' (back cover). This article is titled 'Zines as Crip Doulas' (rather than zines as disabled doulas) because 'crip' is the term Milbern uses, a reclamation of a slur which connects this particular set of belongings to disability justice, activism and a wider critical reclaiming of the term in academic theory and praxis, notably in 'crip studies'. As Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) describes: 'Crip doulaing is both an interpersonal dynamic and one that creates a new disability justice space' (241). How do zine makers negotiate disability as identity, how do they form crip identities, and in what ways do zine makers themselves understand their zines as disability justice or crip activist work?

Zines and identity construction has been explored by zine scholars, and the work of Jennifer Sinor (2003), Anna Poletti (2005), Red Chidgey (2006) and Inge Stockburger (2008) all contribute to an autobiographical studies that expands beyond conventionally published autobiography to include more quotidian forms of life writing. In their examination of feminist zines, Stockburger (2011) asks: 'how exactly do narratives provide opportunities for self-making? What are the mechanics and processes through which speakers create and project identities through narratives?' (32). I am interested in exploring processes of self-identifying as disabled beyond narrative, in how zines engage in self-construction and how they offer identities to others.

A further dimension to my research is demonstrating not just what liminality offers to the study of zines, but what zines offer to the study of liminality. There is an ongoing interest in periods of transition and transformation – from whole social change to personal transitions and becomings. Zines can offer valuable affective and emotional understanding of these periods of liminality and can show we organise, work and live in these in-between spaces.

Wellcome Collection

The field of this research could be characterised as Wellcome Collection's zine collection. Wellcome Collection began as the large collection of medical objects and library assembled by pharmaceutical business owner Henry Wellcome over his lifetime (Wellcome Collection, n.d: 'The history and context of our collections'). When he died, in 1936, he left a substantial legacy to form what became Wellcome Trust, which was responsible, in part, for managing this collection. Whilst significant parts of it were dispersed or distributed to other museums, Henry Wellcome's collection and library remain at the core of the contemporary Wellcome Collection's holding. More recently, Wellcome Collection has sought to redress the colonial history of objects it holds (Wellcome Collection, n.d: 'Medicine Man') and pivoted away from medicine to a focus on 'the human' and lived experience (Wellcome Collection, 2018).

Wellcome has intentionally collected zines since 2016, although the collection was prompted in part by the presence of zine, or zine adjacent, material already in the archive (Cooper, 2024: Appendix 2). Wellcome's librarians, Nicola Cook, Loesja Vigour and Mel Grant, began collecting zines to capture 'a per-zine zeitgeist' (Cook and Vigour, 2018: 95) – an increase in the visibility of perzines and zines related to mental health and self-care – with the collection rapidly expanding to include zines that follow Wellcome's much broader collecting remit around health and the human. Wellcome now has over 1300 catalogued zines, which focus 'very broadly around themes of health (both physical and mental), medicine and the human condition and can range from personal experiences to informative resources' (Cook and Vigour, 2018: 94).

In the sense of this being research grounded in an archival collection, some of the discussion of methods necessitates an account of how I navigated myself in, and selected material from, this collection. Wellcome catalogues its zines in line with all other materials in the library. I worked thematically through the collection: using the search function on the online catalogue or just scrolling through the zine entries; asking for suggestions from librarian Nicola Cook or more widely through social media; and relying not just on access to zines at Wellcome but other means of reading the same zine, whether that was finding copies in other collections, digitised copies or purchasing zines directly from makers. I also came across zines unexpectedly. This is part of the serendipitous nature of zine reading: what zine researcher and proprietor of BOOKS Peter Willis characterises in his PhD research on zines as 'luck as method' (Willis, 2024, personal communication). Though I was concerned with Wellcome Collection's zines, it remained important to place these in the much wider landscape of zine making and DIY publications, and I did not restrict myself to reading and writing about only those zines in Wellcome's collection.

A zine methodology

I describe my methodology as a ‘zine methodology’ to reference how the ‘views, beliefs and values’ (Kara, 2015) that guide the choices I make as a researcher are informed by zine practices, values and ethics. This research methodology builds on other research – both within zine studies and research characterised as ‘zineic’ after Cui Su (2012): ‘embodying the ethos of zine practices whether or not it uses zines directly’. It reflects the close relationship between the zine practices and academic research practices I draw together and captures the importance of zine making itself as a method. To connect my methodology to zine values and practices is not to suggest a single unified framework behind zines. Zines resist an objective description; instead they are characterised by a spectrum of practices and values (Cooper, 2024: 14). These connect to an ethics of zine making – articulated most clearly when people feel it has been violated. The choices I make in this research, about methods of interpretation, analysis or dissemination, are made in this framework. For example, in response to the question I posed earlier of how I navigate the zines in Wellcome Collection, I turned to embodied modes of reading zines that zine makers engage in in other contexts: flicking, skimming and being orientated by desire. In working thematically across the zines at Wellcome, I’ve worked in the same way I organise zines at the barefoot² Edinburgh Zine Library. A zine methodology also foregrounds how I arrived at this research: as a zine maker first.

A zine methodology as a methodology which assembles multiple different frameworks, methods and other methodologies, is not novel, in the sense of researcher as bricoleur (Denzin, 1994) or queer, feminist and decolonial research approaches which adopt scavenger methodologies (Eichorn, 2013; Halberstam, 1998; Niang, 2024; Wekker, 2016). The way scavenger methodologies ‘refuse the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence’ (Halberstam, 1998: 13) connects to zines’ own approach to knowledge production, reflected in practices of citation and choices of source material, and both suit the messy, transdisciplinary nature of zine research. This article describes research that engaged equally with academic literature and zines themselves (both within and outwith Wellcome Collection), alongside twitter threads, oral histories, memes, signal conversations, playlists and zine workshops.

Close reads

There are many ethical questions around zine research, but within this article a key concern is around what it is to read zines in research. Zine maker’s feelings about their zines being collected by institutions like Wellcome Collection are rarely straightforward and raise ethical questions – explored in depth in zine maker and DIY cultural scholar Kirsty Fife’s (2019) article ‘Not for you? Ethical implications of archiving zines’. Wellcome’s zines specifically, with their focus on perzines, health, illness and lived experience, are often made in relationship to wider systems and structures of power in which Wellcome is itself implicated. My own history as a psychiatric survivor, who made zines in part to resist the control I felt mental health services had over narratives of my life, means I am acutely aware of this dynamic and suspicious of any methodology that requires analysis or interpretation that mirrors the same analysis or interpretation I explicitly made zines to resist or that might replicate wider epistemic injustice or violence (Fricker, 2007).

Zines need a mode of reading that accounts for the material text, the words in relationship with the material zine or, after book studies scholar Anne Royston (2019), the ‘nonsemantic’. Zines are a media where text is explicitly in relationship to and inextricable from visual, material and sensory elements. Zine scholars have variously accounted for reading the material zine: through developing interpretive strategies like ‘autographics’ – reading ‘the presentation of text and images, layout and photocopying quality and how they effect, interact with, contradict or interrupt the narrative’ (Poletti, 2008: 88) – or reading the ‘sculptural’ (Piepmeier, 2008: 214) or ‘architectural’ (Brouwer and Licon, 2016: 78) elements of zines. These

strategies of reading zines are echoed in descriptions of reading artists' books and connect to ongoing work on materiality in book studies (Bolaki, 2016; Drucker, 1995; Kilma, 1998).

Reading the material zine does not mean exclusively reading paper zines – not only did the COVID-19 pandemic mean many zines were only accessible as digitised versions, but there has been an increase in born-digital zines. The focus of zine studies has so far been on the paper zine, often placed in contrast to digital media (see, e.g., Hroch, 2020; Piepmeier, 2008). In order to engage with contemporary zine making, zine studies needs to acknowledge the emotional, affective and material differences between reading/making paper and digital zines. Building on rhetoric scholar Daniel C. Brouwer and Adela C. Licona's (2016) work on digitised zines, which treats 'print zines and digital zines as distinct and distinctly affective domains with dis/similar affective possibilities and constraints, coherences and incoherences and intensities' (78), zine studies needs to engage with trans(affective)mediation in zine (re)production, as well as in distribution and archiving. In taking a 'reflexive stance of ambivalence' (Brouwer and Licona, 2016: 70), zine studies can engage with paper and digital zines in a non-hierarchical way which also doesn't reinforce a false binary between paper and digital. Indeed, the blurred boundaries between these different forms of zines make characterising them in opposition to each other difficult. I've settled on 'paper' zines as the most appropriate shorthand for those zines that you read on paper – because to characterise these as 'physical' zines against digital ones wrongly suggests that digital zines don't have a physical presence, a materiality, or to characterise these as 'print' zines against digital ones wrongly suggests that we can't consider digital print practices or that many methods of printing don't involve digitisation or indeed that handwritten zines constitute 'print'.

Reading zines is not solely an encounter with a material object: Kate Eichorn (2001) describes how she began researching zines as a textual community to avoid the ethical complications of ethnographic methods but rapidly found 'in sending away for zines, [she] had unintentionally initiated the process of negotiating access to a community' (569). Zine reading isn't just about the textual or material dimensions of reading but implicates wider networks of production, circulation and communities of practice. As a zine maker, whose zines were collected by Wellcome Collection long before I became a researcher, a zine librarian and organiser of a zine festival, I cannot offer any distance from the site of my research. In this article, I engage in a close reading of several zines that enact *crip doulaing*. The 'close' of close reading feels important in the context of reading zines that touch on, amongst other things, the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing but also in grappling with the complications and tensions of my proximity to the subject of my research.

There is a meme of two film stills, stacked one on top of the other, from the 2019 film *Knives Out*. In the top still, detective Benoit Blanc, played by actor Daniel Craig, holds his hands up in exasperation, face grimacing. Text of Blanc's speech reads 'It makes no damn sense'. In the bottom still, Blanc's face has relaxed. Text reads: 'Compels me though'. I include this meme in workshops I facilitate on zines and zine making, inviting participants to consider the importance of being moved by things you don't understand. Although a zine may feel like it doesn't make sense, if we expand our idea of sense-making beyond looking for narrative, we can start to make meaning from the affective and sensory. We can be compelled. This reading beyond narrative is particularly important given my research's focus on liminality in experiences of health, illness and disability. Liminality is often absent from narrative approaches – treated as absence, non-sense or chaos. Scholars in the medical humanities have questioned the privileging of narrative and in particular the illness narrative (Woods, 2011). Feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed's (2019) discussion of use and its relationship to form are particularly illuminating when considering relationships between zines and narrative and the uses of zines within Wellcome's collection. Lived experience becomes lived experience made useful. It is, typically, a narrative form; values a perceived authenticity or naivety; and has the primary purpose, or use, of communicating experiences to an outside audience, often one that

either holds a view informed by dominant media discourse (the ‘public’) or which has privileged professional or academic knowledge. These characteristics are central to understanding the zines at Wellcome Collection, as they are recruited into Wellcome’s reorientation from a history of medicine toward ‘the human’, and their value is articulated in terms of lived experience, but zines are unwieldy and often resist their use as lived experience.

Crip Doulas

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) records a conversation with Stacey Park Milbern in which they explore ‘crip doulaing’ as ‘naming disability as a space we can be born into, supported and welcomed by other disabled people’ so that we are not ‘left alone to figure out how to be . . . in this ableist world’ (241). As they reflect on crip doulaing in their conversation, both Piepzna-Samarasinha and Milbern consider how histories of organising, of care work, are often lost or forgotten because of white supremacy in disability history. Yet, Milbern also describes zines as one material trace of the work of crip doulaship: ‘we do this work of seeking ourselves out across time and planes, scribbling letters to each other in zines...’ (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018: 243). The zines in Wellcome Collection are traces that create genealogies and record practices of crip doulaship.

Crip doulaing addresses the ‘life stages and rites of passage of becoming disabled’ and involves a paradigmatic shift, to view ‘coming into disability identity as a birth, not a death’ (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018: 241). It also involves a shift from traditional accounts of liminality; to be disabled or to be crip is an immanent process of becoming and not a transition into a stable social state so much as something that is continually being (re)constituted. In this article, I offer a reading of two zines which, in different ways, doula life stages and rites of passage of becoming disabled, demonstrating the ways that liminality offers a generative framework for what zines do for those who make and read them.

What does a COVID-19 Doula Do? (WWHIVDD, 2020) is a digital zine ‘made to be distributed online’, rather than printed off. It was created by the WHAT WOULD AN HIV DOULA DO? (WWHIVDD) community, a collective formed in response to the ongoing AIDS crisis’. Through thinking of HIV as a series of transitions and the work of a doula as holding space through times of transition, the collective’s work includes workshops, exhibitions, artworks, programmes of events, resources and zines like this one – often framed around questions like what does a COVID-19 doula do? or what would an HIV-informed cultural worker do?

Although every page of the PDF of *What does a COVID-19 Doula Do?* has the same proportions of a horizontal A4 sheet (the same shape as an open spread of a typical A5 zine) and much of the text and contributions are formatted as if onto facing pages, the actual pages are numbered so each whole spread is one page. There’s no pretence or performance of turning a page, which often accompanies digital zines on platforms such as Issuu or Heyzine, which I use for my digital zines. It feels more like scrolling a slide deck. The zine’s background is a bright orange, brighter than possible if this was printed on anything other than the glossiest magazine paper, with headings in yellow, page numbers in purple and text in white, alongside reproduced photos, film stills and digital ephemera like screenshots of notes apps and Instagram stories.

In their conversation, Milbern and Piepzna-Samarasinha offer some ideas of what crip doulaing might mean: Milbern describes ‘Crip mentorship/coaching/modelling at its best is “disability doulaship”’ (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018: 241). WWHIVDD’s zine offers a broader framework for my consideration of what crip doulaing is and does and how zines are and do these things. In this article I focus on crip doulaing as both ‘selfing’ and ‘shelving’. Firstly I consider zines as supporting the formation of crip identities, and secondly I consider how zines are involved in coming to archives as a crip rite of passage.

Crip doulaing as naming the space to be born into

The Ring of Fire Anthology reproduces abridged versions of Issue 2 (1997) and 3 (1999) of *Ring of Fire*, a series of zines created by E. T. Russian (aka Hellery Homosex) from 1996 onwards as a teenager and young adult as they healed from a traumatic accident and ‘embraced a cultural identity of disability’ (Russian, 2014: back cover). The anthology also offers new material written before the book’s publication in 2014, which Russian had originally intended to use in a new issue of the zine before the anthology was proposed by not-for-profit publishing co-op Left Bank Books. *The Ring of Fire Anthology* is more accessible than most of the zines in Wellcome Collection – it sits on the open shelves of the library, rather than viewable only by request in the Rare Materials Room – but as a zine anthology, it offers a different material reading experience to the original zines themselves. In *The Ring of Fire Anthology*, we are offered both the zine as record of Russian’s transition into disability and their later reflections on disability justice.³

In exploring their relationship to other crip folks, and specifically other amputees, Russian blurs real and imagined interactions. In the reproduction of *Ring of Fire* Issue 2 (Russian, 2014), a single page presents a black and white line illustration of a naked Russian embracing a naked Kahlo (21). The stumps of Russian’s lower legs are sutured with string, loose threads on either end tendril out. Kahlo’s right lower leg is similarly sutured – she had it amputated in 1953. Part of the page is cut away – visible in the faint line created when it was reproduced. What did Russian remove from the page (if anything)? Small handwritten text at the top of the page reads ‘we were eighteen years old’ – a reference to the age at which both Russian and Kahlo experienced their accidents. ‘Frida. my sister. my soulmate. my inspiration. my lover. my mirror’ is written in the top right corner of the page, and then, in more cursive writing beneath the drawing, ‘let your hair down for me.’ This request, given the relation of the two figures in the drawing where Russian has their arms wrapped around Kahlo, feels like a reference to Rapunzel; in the fairy tale, it is the long hair of its eponymous imprisoned princess that allows both her captor and eventually her lover (a handsome prince) to gain access to the tower in which she is held. Russian is asking for access, a route in, hair to climb.

In *Ring of Fire* Issue 3 (2014), Russian devotes four pages of handwritten text to their relationship to Kahlo (116–119). Russian recreates two of Kahlo’s paintings, the piece ‘Self Portrait as a Tehuana’ and the ex-voto ‘to the Virgin of Sorrows for Frida Kahlo’ depicting Kahlo’s traumatic and disabling accident, both in thick black pen. Russian considers their connection to Kahlo’s work before their accident; they describe how they would be ‘deeply affected by the emotion she put into her painting’ (117), but ‘I’d never quite known how she felt until I got ran over’ (117). Although Russian refers to their lives as ‘paralleling’, the effect of their writing feels more like their stories are entangled: ‘On September 14, 1996, I was run over by a train at the age of 18. On September 17, 1925 Frida was riding a bus that collided with a trolley. My legs were amputated. Her spine, pelvis, collarbone, ribs, and right leg and foot were all broken plus her left shoulder dislocated’ (118). This extends the meaning of Russian’s all-caps realisation ‘SHE WAS DISABLED’ (118) to both Kahlo’s and their own identity.

Russian complicates the timeline of this story in a way that could be read as a description of how Kahlo’s art functioned for them as a liminal affective technology: ‘In a way I feel like Frida’s art helped me prepare for my train accident. The timing of the SF MOMA show returned her to the forefront of my mind right before I got run over’ (119). Liminal affective technologies are ‘a cultural resource, tool, medium or technology that affords liminal experiences of a particular “self-created” kind ... in order to facilitate, accompany, or engender relevant social transitions and associated personal transformations’ (Stenner and Greco, 2018: 4). Social psychologists Paul Stenner and Tania Zittoun (2020) distinguish between ‘devised liminal experiences’ and spontaneous liminal experiences, between art and life. Where spontaneous liminal experiences happen to us and involve ‘world rupture and subsequent transformation’, devised liminal experiences are what ‘we do to ourselves in a rarefied virtual space/time abstracted from daily practical reality’ (Stenner and Zittoun, 2020: 5–6): liminality in art or in song, a ‘transition that is enacted virtually and mediated by a

symbolic resource' (Stenner and Zittoun, 2020: 5). They approach the connections between the two – the ways that 'art and life reciprocally interpenetrate one another' through liminal affective technologies – creating a lineage between ritual (the first liminal affective technology) and theatre or performance, literature, and films (amongst forms of cultural production) in which liminal experiences are created or summoned in order to 'facilitate, accompany, or engender relevant social transitions and associated personal transformations' (Stenner and Zittoun, 2020: 4).

Bringing in Matuschka, an American-Ukrainian photographer, artist and activist, Russian (2014) writes: 'why I was so obsessed with radical mastectomy imagery + Frida's paintings I could not figure out, but now, after the accident, I wonder if they were preparing me for the loss of my legs' (119). The work of these artists helped prepare Russian for their transition, to becoming disabled, but this is not a uni-directional relationship. When Russian names Kahlo as disabled, they explain that 'no one had ever actually described her that way before, but that's exactly what she was' (118). Disability births disability. Russian's reflections suggest a wider audience to their zines than other disabled or crip people; their work may become, that is, a future resource for currently enabled, pre-disabled or temporarily able-bodied people, mirroring Russian's own encounters with Kahlo and Matuschka. In these pages of *Ring of Fire*, we see not just the Russian forming their own identity but also gain insight into how these zine pages might offer a resource for others as they come into disability as an identity.

In her zine *Who Counts as Disabled?*, Robertson (2024) describes self-identifying as disabled as fundamental to disability justice, but this self-identification does not happen in a vacuum. *Believing*, a zine from Mad zine maker and artist Rachel Rowan-Olive (2021), is digitally printed, in colour, each page recreating a page of watercolour painting, textured with fine liner and handwritten text. In it, Rowan-Olive (2021) explores 'believing' as central to Mad community: 'This is friendship amongst the mad/we believe each other' (npn).

The zine opens with a quote from the poem 'Panopticon' by Ailbhe Darcy (2007), which is written in the aftermath of the loss of Matthew, someone she loved, to 'Madness': 'Your friends expect to weigh forever/ what we could have given/ against what we could not change'. Rowan-Olive describes creating this zine after writing a piece about bereavement by suicide and the grief of service user/survivor communities. Whilst the opening quote keeps the zine grounded in this context, it offers a complicated exploration of being in Mad community more broadly: 'how we love each other in a system that hurts us; how we try to move forward with our lives knowing that there might never be justice; how caring for each other does not mean it's ok that the mental health system fails us so badly' (Rowan-Olive, 2021: npn).

The watercolours in *Believing* create strange landscapes, the pen lines feeling like lines that mark maps or that track the flow of water, and sometimes like stitches on a quilt.⁴ The colour palette subtly shifts across the pages: a bloody red on the page that reads 'We believe each other so hard we wear mouthguards to stop our teeth grinding in the night'; a bright yellow bursting through behind the text 'So I believe you I believe you I believe you'; the final four pages shifting from blues to green. Rather than try and offer an interpretation of Rowan-Olive's colour choices, instead I offer that it compels me – that the dreamlike space *Believing* invites me into is heavy with grief and that the fluidity of the watercolour contrasts with the strength of her statement of belief, her assertion of faith in fellow survivors. The combination of semantic and nonsemantic elements in *Believing* offers a powerful affective resistance to the epistemic injustice psychiatric survivors face (Walker, 2024).

Belief and self-identification are a site where crip identities meet and intersect with other identities and wider political forces. In my own zine *You Don't Need a Psychiatrist to Tell You You're Autistic* (Cooper, 2023), I connect self-identifying as autistic with psychiatric abolition. It feels impossible to talk about self-identification (particularly given Robertson's zine *Who Counts as Disabled?* reproduces a resource created by the SNP Disabled Members Group) without thinking of the fears around self-id for transgender people,

which flared up during the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) reforms that began in Scotland in 2022 and were blocked by the UK government in January 2023.

Crip doulaing as time travel: Coming to archives

Zines engage in archival practices, for example, when they collect objects and transform them (through scanning, flattening, photocopying) for the purpose of preservation (Baker and Cantillon, 2022); the ways zines connect grief, memorial and archive (Cooper, 2024) or the ways that zines can create archives of feelings (Cooper, 2024). Zine makers are also implicated in archiving in creating zine anthologies such as *The Ring of Fire Anthology* (Lymn, 2013), but, in thinking about archiving as a practice of crip doulaing, this is not the straightforward archiving of a static past for posterity. Crip doulaing is not about linear movement, and the liminality of disability is not the space between two stable states (not disabled/disabled). Crip and disabled identities are continually made and remade, and crip doulaing embraces the potential of liminality as a space of future imagining, of making disabled futures. In doing so, it also destabilises the past, forming new connections and genealogies. Author and bookworker So Mayer (2020) connects dancer and scholar Julian Carter's (2023) work on 'folded time' to archives. Carter (2023) proposes that 'rather than imagining transition as a linear progression, what would happen if we imagine transitions between genders, like choreographic transitions, as places in time in which numerous movements – forward, backward, sideways, tangential – are equally possible and can coexist?'. Mayer discusses recovery work and queer relationships to archives through this notion of folded time, through the tense of the subjunctive, the conditional or speculative.

In their introduction to *What Would a COVID-19 doula do?* (WWHIVDD Collective, 2020), Alexandra Juhasz reflects on bringing together and curating the show *Metanoia: Transformation through AIDS Archives and Activism*. They invite a step into the future – 'imagine a show like ours, in the future. An archival show of the representational life and objects of COVID, thirty years from now' (WWHIVDD, 2020: 7). They suggest that the zine *What Would a COVID-19 doula do?* calls 'for a future that will learn from all we did in this shared present'. In this 'the present does not merely cite the past ... but is instead a rematerialisation of it' (Carter, 2023). In this second half, I consider how practices of speculative fiction, tied to zines' historical connections to science fiction, are used in zines to both imagine futures and create archives (or imagine archives and create futures) and how through these acts, past and future, fold over on each other so instead of two distinct stable states divided by a liminal period, the present becomes, as characterised by Carter (2023), 'transitional time'.

In *What Would a COVID-19 Doula Do?*, Nicholas D'Avella describes 'As an HIV and COVID doula, part of my practice involves rethinking the present through apocalyptic fantasy.... Speculative fiction is a tool through which foremother doulas like Octavia Butler and Ursula K Le Guin, or contemporary writers like Torrey Peters, work to rethink our reality' (WWHIVDD, 2020: 43). It would take many more words to unpack the tight relationships and multiple histories and presents of zines and science fiction, speculative fiction and fantasy. The nine-page story *Assassin Bitches in Heat!* in 1997's *Ring of Fire* Issue 2 (Russian, 2014), written by Russian by hand, and illustrated with four black and white illustrations of people being spanked with different objects, suggests how some of the technologies of speculative fiction and fantasy connect to the ways crip doulaing involves imaging crip futures. *Assassin Bitches in Heat!* is a piece of queer crip erotica. It opens with the lines: 'As the army tanks were coming, so was I. Me and my girlfriend had just bombed the White House and we were celebrating...' (30). The speaker and their girlfriend Glory, members of a terrorist collective, are fucking after bombing the White House. As Glory is whipping the speaker, she turns on the TV:

The nation was in pandemonium from the White House shock and every channel was covering the story in a special news bulletin:

The bombing appears to be the act of some sort of militant homosexual disabled person's terrorist group. Just outside the bombing wreckage was a message in red spraypaint which read 'QUEER CRIPS SHALL PREVAIL UPON THE DEATH OF SOCIETY' ... The neon glow from the t.v reflected on her face as she bitched about the government. And with that crop in her hand she looked like one scary ass bitch. MY DREAMGIRL !!! (Russian, 2014: 31–32)

This is erotica, clearly, and a work of speculative fiction – it is post-apocalyptic event, but where the apocalypse wrought is not upon the protagonist but upon someone else's world by the speaker. The erotics of the story depend upon delay, creating a space of suspension. In larger, more desperate, writing, the final line of seventh page reads 'I thought I would burst. I still hadn't cum' (Russian, 2014: 33). It imagines a world-breaking event and anticipates the work of remaking: the final paragraph begins: 'The next morning we woke up and ate nails for breakfast. We had work to do' (Russian, 2014: 34). When I'm in institutional zine workshops and talk about how zines imagine futures, I don't think many of my audience of third-sector organisations and public librarians are thinking it will involve a kink scene with two domestic terrorists fist-fighting, but this is the queer crip future that Russian writes, and then, crucially, returns to archive in the form of this zine anthology nearly 20 years later.

Mayer characterises a coming to archives, to recovery work, as a queer rite of passage: 'In a movement and community where still too few activists and artists survive to be elders, the real queer and trans coming of age is not coming out, but coming to recovery work: first as a viewer or reader finding themselves, then as a participant in the archives' (2020: 26). The fact that many zine makers move into zine librarianship and into archives (the 'afterlives' of zines proposed by Janice Radway (2011)) is perhaps reflective of a coming-of-age shared by queer and crip zine makers. If coming to archives is a crip rite of passage, then to doula this rite of passage is to share knowledge of archiving and create and explore alternative forms of archives.

Archiving Joy (Williams, 2022) is slim, perfect bound digitally printed A5 zine; the pages are divided into sections of light yellow (marking creator Lu Williams' contributions) and lavender (marking the contributions of their invited collaborators: Elliot Gibbons, George Morl, Hava Carvajal, How Furber, Laura Love, Maz Murray and Merline Evans). The back page describes this as 'A story of Trancestory and reimagining of "the archive"'. Williams uses the zine to document their (great) Aunt Joy, Rosemary Joy Erskin, a transgender woman b. 1924–1996, alongside work on queer archives and work from members of the queer community across Essex. They open the zine with a discussion of the state of national archives and their relationship to LGBTQ+ histories, expressing a dissatisfaction with archival practice that 'thinks it's wrong to impose our terminology of those who wouldn't have had the choice to choose it in their own lifetime' (Williams, 2022: 7).

In his contribution to Archiving Joy, "'OH BOY!": Working with and against the archive', Elliot Gibbons, a writer, researcher and curator with a particular interest in queer histories outside urban centres and during the AIDS crisis in Britain, proposes using a methodology aligned with writer and cultural historian Saidiya Hartman's (2008) 'critical fabulation' to work with and against archives such as the Lesbian and Gay News Media Archives at the Bishopsgate Institute in London, which he describes as haunted by the Sexual Offences Act and Section 28 (Williams, 2022: 20). Hartman (2008) develops 'critical fabulation', using storytelling and imagining archival narratives, in response to the violent archival silences of Atlantic slavery. Hartman first uses the phrase in her essay 'Venus in Two Acts' where she manages the tensions of imagining a story where there is only silence and absence in the historical record, considering 'the relationship between history and the violence of the archive as well as its fiction and its elasticity'.

In this vein, Williams engages in their own practices of fictioning in Archiving Joy. They watch a video of a family wedding where Joy dashes in front of the camera and holds her handbag over her face, prompting Williams to ask 'Maybe Joy didn't want to be archived?' (Williams, 2022: 35). The text on this page ends when 'The recording stops' and the opposite page assembles stills of the video described. On the

following page, Williams offers a fictional account of a meeting with Joy, which is written in the present and begins as Williams looks up from their laptop. It feels like an interruption to the writing that precedes it, as if Joy has arrived to address Williams' fear that they crossed a boundary.

This fictional encounter with Joy connects with the Russian's imagined encounter with Kahlo in *Ring of Fire*. In her discussion of the archival turn in feminism, Kate Eichhorn cautions that 'at stake [in feminist archives] are not the worlds these collections represent, but rather the worlds they invite us to imagine and even realize' (Eichhorn, 2013: 160). Archiving Joy is as much an intervention into the present as it is a retrieval of the past. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) subtitles *Care Work* as 'dreaming disability justice'. This is dreaming not as wishful thinking or hopeful imagining. This is dreaming as in the borderland, liminal space, a space of speculative imagining (about past and future), a reimagining of our present. Writing of illness and disability narratives, Alison Kafer (2021) asks:


How do these kinds of stories rely on the straightness of linear time, the belief that becoming disabled is a single moment, tangible, identifiable, turning life into a solid, singular, static before-and-after? Can we tell crip tales, crip time tales, with multiple befores and afters, proliferating befores and afters, all making more crip presents possible? (417)

In those zines where time is folded, archives are speculative and futures are archived, crip presents become possible and even realised.

Conclusion

In this article, liminality offers a generative alternative to marginality in understanding some of the zines held by Wellcome Collection. Simultaneously, these zines, in doulaing the ongoing rites of passage and periods of transition in crip and disabled becomings, expand our understanding of liminality beyond a carefully managed linear transition between two fixed states. I have offered a brief consideration of two dimensions of zines as crip doulas connected to the 'selfing and shelving' theme of this special issue – demonstrating how examining what zines 'do' contributes to a better understanding of crip doulaing as a practice and expands existing zine scholarship on zines as identify formation (selfing) and coming to archival practices (shelving). More broadly, this article contributes to understanding what creative forms and media offers to liminal experiences – why we continue to make zines about experiences of transformation, transition, becoming and in-betweenness. Though here I am concerned specifically with disabled becomings, it invites the question: what other experiences of transition might zines doula?

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Notes

1. Throughout this article I use 'Wellcome' to refer to Wellcome Collection, the museum and library, which is distinct from Wellcome Trust, the charitable foundation often shortened to Wellcome.
2. 'Barefoot' is a term used within the zine library community to distinguish grassroots or DIY zine libraries from institutional or academic ones.
3. These reflections have been further expanded through the commissioning of a new animated work by Russian for the exhibition of Wellcome Collection's zines 'Zines Forever! DIY Publications and Disability Justice'.
4. Wellcome Collection acquired the original watercolours of this zine for the exhibition 'Zines Forever! DIY Publications and Disability Justice' – on closer examination, the pages are in fact stitched in places with thread.

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