



Limping Along: Toward a Crip Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT: A queer crip embodied experience of limping is the point of departure for my reflections on the differences between a crip phenomenology and a phenomenology of disability. I argue that a crip phenomenology can further understanding of how ableism and heteronormativity work together, along with other structures of violence, to shape experiences at the edges of ability and disability, and, indeed, the possibility of queer crip movement in and through worlds.

KEYWORDS: Queer, Crip, Disability, Gender, Phenomenology, Walking, Embodiment, Crip Phenomenology

My walk has always been a problem, or should I say my walk has always made me a problem. I was born with what in my life has often been referred to as a malformed hip joint. More specifically, I was born with a shortened acetabulum, which meant that my hip socket did not completely curl around my femoral head on my left side. It was a case, one might say, of arrested hip development. Not enough hip. Not hip enough. My so-called birth defect was diagnosed during a routine pediatric exam meant to check for such anomalies; when the pediatrician bent my knees toward my chest and then rolled them outward, they heard the tell-tale sound of my left femur popping out of joint. And when my mother changed my diapers, my left leg would fly off at an awkward angle.

I have no memory of what my hip popping out of joint felt like. However, I do have memories of treatment—being wheeled into surgery, being casted and braced, regular follow-up appointments with the orthopedic surgeon until I was eleven, and the dreaded trip to the shoe store where I was never permitted to get the shoes I wanted, for orthopedic and gendered reasons. I was nearly two when I had surgery

on my left hip. This was followed by three months in a body cast coupled with a brace that consisted of a metal bar between two shoes that kept my feet fixed in position pointing outward. After the cast was removed, I wore a brace to secure my hip day and night, and then later, until age four or five, I was braced at night to prevent movement that might injure my hip.

All of this meant that my walking was delayed. One of my uncles attached four wheels to a finished square piece of plywood so that I could roll around the house. My earliest ambulation in the world was head first, on my stomach. My mom says I was hard to catch. There were many things I was not allowed to do at kindergarten for fear that, like someone's grandparent, I would fall and break my hip. Looking up, watching as other kids climbed the steps to the top of the sliding board is seared into my memory. By first grade, I was no longer braced at night, but I still had to go to the orthopedic clinic, where I would be x-rayed and where I was required to walk up and down the hallway under the diagnostic gaze of the orthopedist and my mother. The result: I walk, but with a difference. As a way of thinking about the meaning of a *crip* phenomenology, I want to consider how this difference matters.

Aside from the thick scar that runs the length of the area of my hip joint, the lingering evidence of this experience is in my walk. I have what many characterize as a limp (more on this later), though it is a limp that also embodies a swagger. The experience of having to walk up and down the hallway while doctors evaluated my gait, along with periodically being chastised for either walking "like my father" or "like a truck driver," joins the two: I have a limping swagger or a swaggering limp. Either way, my gait exceeds the bounds of the normal. My limping swaggering/swaggering limping gait is, I suggest, a mode of queer *crip* ambulation in the world.

I use the phrase *queer crip* to describe my walk, drawing on Nancy Mairs's explanation of why she prefers to identify as *cripple* rather than *disabled*: "As a *cripple*, I *swagger*" (1986, 9).¹ Like the word *queer*, *cripple* has a history of being weaponized against stigmatized groups singled out by the term. And like *queer*, *crip* (a shortened form of *cripple*) has been reclaimed by many to describe experiences that aren't typically associated with disability and to name a politics of proud, spectacular defiance of pressures to assimilate to exclusionary norms. *Queer* and *crip* call for a more expansive understanding of gender, sexuality, ability, and disability attuned to experiences that defy conventional assumptions about who is included in or excluded from a category, like gender or disability. An experience of being disabled at birth and then subjected to medical interventions aimed at normalizing my body and its movements by erasing disability is not what most people have in mind when they think of disability experience. Within conventional understandings of disability, my experience might be categorized as an experience of cure.

Nonetheless, in limping one stands out, and one's navigation is often interrupted by questions like "What's wrong?" "What happened?" "What did you do to

yourself?” Such questions communicate that one doesn’t belong. One’s movement through space is interrupted; one is asked to explain oneself. To limp is to fail to meet expectations of fluid motion—a monstrous occupation of space. When one has been categorized as cured, a limping gait defies expectations of how abled, normal bodies move: “But you had surgery, and you were able to play sports?!” “Why are you limping?” To swagger is also to defiantly move through space; a swagger is an embodied assertion of self that is unconcerned with what others might think. When it’s part of one’s gender nonconforming embodied being in the world, a swagger flouts gendered expectations, asserting and affirming one’s presence in a world predicated on one’s shame, misery, or non-existence.

Moving toward a crip phenomenology entails grappling with the space of lived ambiguity materialized in my gait—a space at the edges of gender, between disability and ability. However else they’ve been understood, queer and crip are also terms for bodies, minds, spaces at the edges of certainty and methods for understanding those edges as sites of pain and freedom, all at once. To explain queer-crip experience we need, it seems to me, a crip phenomenology, which is, as I will discuss, something other than a phenomenology of disability.² In what follows, I first discuss what I take to be important differences between a phenomenology of disability and a crip phenomenology, focusing on how disability has appeared in classic phenomenology. I then consider how walking has figured in philosophy as an example of ableist assumptions in philosophy, thinking with feminist and queer phenomenological critiques of normalized and normalizing accounts of nonnormate embodiment and walking. Finally, I consider what it might mean to crip phenomenology from the perspective of a queer crip gender non-conforming butch limping-swaggering body.

Phenomenology Between Disability and Crip

Nonnormate, extraordinary body-minds have been a standard feature of phenomenological analyses; however, as many have noted, their function in that work has often served to outline the features of the normate³ lived bodymind. As Joel Michael Reynolds puts it in his reading of Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the blind man’s cane, canonical phenomenological texts are informed by an “ableist conflation” of disability with “pain, suffering, and disadvantage,” a conflation that distorts disabled experience in its failure to engage with disability as it is lived (2018, 420–421). Put differently, disability has functioned in conventional phenomenology as what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2000) call a narrative prosthesis that props up the able bodymind whose experiences are assumed and universalized.

To take just one example, consider the opening lines of Erwin Straus’s discussion of the upright posture:

A break-down of physical well-being is alarming; it turns our attention to functions that, on good days, we take for granted. A healthy person does not ponder about breathing, seeing, or walking. Infirmities of breath, sight, or gait *startle us*. Among the patients consulting a psychiatrist, there are some who can no longer master the seemingly banal arts of standing and walking. They are not paralyzed, but, under certain conditions, they cannot, or feel as if they cannot, keep themselves upright. They tremble and quiver. Incomprehensible terror takes away their strength. Sometimes a minute change in the physiognomy of the frightful situation may restore their strength. Obviously, upright posture is not confined to the technical problems of locomotion. It contains a psychological element. It's pregnant with a meaning not exhausted by the physiological tasks of meeting the forces of gravity and maintaining equilibrium. (1966, 137, emphasis added)

Straus opens his discussion of upright posture with a description of the thoughtless, routine navigation of the world that marks a "healthy" person's locomotion. Globally equated with the unhealthy, disability figures in this description as a "frightful" and "startling" disruption of the ordinary. Ultimately focused on normative standing and walking, Straus's discussion is peppered with references to disability, not as lived but as imagined loss of a taken-for-granted way of being in and navigating the world.

Straus's opening lines in "The Upright Posture" exemplify a pattern in conventional phenomenology in which disability appears as an object of fascinating interest rather than as lived embodied experience. For Reynolds, it is only by ignoring the impact of ableist structures on disabled bodily experience in the world—that is, only by ignoring "the difference that disability makes"—that Merleau-Ponty is able to assume that the blind man's cane is seamlessly incorporated into his embodied being, a habituated accommodation in response to loss, deficiency, and lack (2018, 423–424). Crippling phenomenology, Reynolds contends, is a matter of attending to the world-creating embodiment of disability, disability as lived, not in the form of abstract thought experiment, but concretely in a world deeply structured by ableism. He writes, "In so far as the historical, cultural, and social cannot be split from the natural, biological, and individual, the historical traces of ableism and ableist conflation cannot be erased from the form and materiality of the body. A successful crip phenomenology will always seek to bring such traces into relief" (Reynolds 2018, 426). In other words, it is only from an ableist perspective that disability can be abstracted from the context of ableism and other structures of oppression that give it meaning. In addition, when disability is abstracted from contexts of oppression, the navigated world is assumed to be basically the same for all bodyminds, a neutral backdrop for bodily movement and comportment.

Still another way disability has appeared in phenomenology has been in phenomenological accounts of the body gone awry. An illustration of this approach can be found in Drew Leder's (1990) phenomenology of the absent body. The absent body, for Leder, is the body below the surface of conscious awareness, whose workings are ordinarily invisible to oneself and others (1990, 1–2). Examples of this phenomenon include the circulation of blood, the process of digestion, the physiology below the surface of the skin, in the body's interior, that makes possible bodily movement, experience, and engagement with and in the world. As the examples of circulation and digestion demonstrate, the body's absence is crucial for embodied being in the world. The body's absent-presence haunts all experience. However, Leder also considers those moments when one becomes aware of one's absent body, a moment of intrusion into the ordinary when bodily parts and functions burst forth from oblivion, consuming one's entire awareness (1990, 75–92). It becomes difficult to think of anything but the entire painful kinetic chain of hip, knee, ankle, and foot as one walks, for example. Leder's account of the body's absent-presence and dys-appearance⁴ is a story of ability and disability, for it is only in the context disability (e.g., pain, illness, injury) that the normally absent body becomes present as an object of attention.

Leder defines the phenomenon of the absent-presence of the body as “the body's own tendency for self-concealment that allows for the possibility of its neglect or deprecation. Our organic bodies can be easily forgotten due the reticence of visceral processes. Intentionality can be attributed to a disembodied mind, given the self-efacement of the ecstatic body. As these disappearances particularly characterize normal and healthy functioning, forgetting or ‘freeing oneself’ from the body takes on a positive valuation” (Leder 1990, 69). For Leder, such absences are part of the “normal” body's presence; however, other modes of the body's “being-away” characterize what he describes as “disharmonious” appearances of the body. The disharmonious experiences of the body are, in Leder's text, scenes of disability where the body, as he tells it, becomes present as alien to and at odds with one's self. For example, Leder describes disease and pain as an experience of “body regions” heretofore in the background bio-mechanical hum of the body's ordinary being in the world, constricting one's habitual, coordinated movement to one painful site. The disabled body appears in Leder's text as an “alien presence”:

[D]isease, even more than pain, is typified by complex patterns of dysfunction. The ‘I can’ of bodily ecstasis is disturbed. What results is not, however, identical to the ‘I cannot’ of the recessive body. The latter refers to the fact that one's visceral functions continually and necessarily elude direct control. One is simply *un-able*. In disease, one is actively *dis-abled*. Abilities that were previously in one's command and rightfully belong to the habitual body have now been lost. This could be termed the phenom-

enon of the 'I no longer can.' When sick I no longer engage the world as I once could. There may be nostalgia for lost possibility, hope for its return, fear that disability will further spread. (1990, 81)

Leder offers an insightful analysis of what the sudden appearance of pain or disease can feel like. Nevertheless, like Straus's account of upright posture, the description of disability he provides is from the perspective of the nondisabled bodymind. In other words, disability appears as loss of ability, occasioning a longing for ability. The nondisabled bodymind is the mode of default being in the world; disability is conceived as unwelcome intrusion. Such accounts rely on depoliticized, medicalized conceptions of disability that have devastating consequences for disabled people. Conceptions of disability as loss of ability feed into ableist assumptions that disabled lives are lesser lives, lives not worth living, lives with no future (see Kafer 2013). Medicalized and depoliticized, disability is conceived as unwelcome intrusion that should be eliminated. If the limits of the body are the limits of the world, there is a connection between the conception of disability as unwelcome and in need of elimination and the desire for a world with no disability (that is, no disabled people) in it (see Kafer 2013; Garland-Thomson 2012).

Leder's account is founded on the nondisabled body's imagined experience of loss of ability that results from disease or injury; the lived experience of disability is absent from his analysis.⁵ Certainly, pain can be overwhelming and hyperpresent in one's bodily experience. Christina Crosby, for example, describes pain as that which brings loneliness because of the impossibility of adequately communicating one's pain to others; no one else can know one's pain (2016, 31). And Susan Wendell describes the unpredictability and episodic temporality of chronic pain (2001). The problem isn't the fact that Leder describes how pain can overwhelm one's experience of one's bodymind; it's the depoliticized approach to disability and the equation of disability with loss that characterize the ableist assumption underlying Leder's analysis of the absent body. Leder describes pain as a deviation from the normal, healthy state of the body; he does not offer an account of living with pain. Thus, Leder offers a phenomenology of disability, where the *of* positions disability as object and narrative prosthesis rather than lived experience in the analysis. Such an approach adopts an ableist perspective that either imagines what it might mean to lose current bodily capacities or draws on medical case studies of bodymind deviations from the norm. As such, a phenomenology of disability is informed by philosophy's ableism wherein disability is the object rather than the subject of philosophy (Carlson 2010, 10). While there is certainly no denial of the social world in a phenomenology of disability, disability's appearance in the analysis as deviation from the norm ultimately naturalizes the association of ability with health, rendering the bodymind's "I cannot" or "I no longer can" solely an experience of individual bodily

limitation. This ableist imaginary of disability feeds into ableist imperatives to eliminate disability in the bodymind and in society and restore the body to normalized modes of absent-presence. Within ableist-oriented phenomenology disability is an unwelcome intrusion reinforcing the ableist assumption that, if they could, disabled people would rather be “normal” (Sandahl interviewed in Mitchel and Snyder 1996; Clare 2017). Disabilities appear in ableist-oriented phenomenology as objects of fascinating deviations from the norm, inviting presumed able-body-minded readers to imagine what it would be like to lose current bodily capacities, presenting disability as philosophical thought experiment. Whatever their insights may be, these texts offer a phenomenology of/about disability, but they do not offer a crip phenomenology.

Building on these insights, I would like to press further the notion of what it might mean to ground phenomenology (or philosophy more generally) in lived non-normate bodily experience. A crip phenomenology, I suggest, is not only a matter of introducing disability as a new object of study into the field. Crip, as Robert McRuer explains, calls attention to the mutual imbrication of structures of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness, such that able-body-mindedness requires heterosexuality, and vice versa, heterosexuality requires able-body-mindedness (2006; 2018; 2020). A crip phenomenology also crips phenomenology, thinking on and against normalizing assumptions about lived bodyminds that have shaped the field, smuggling⁶ queer crip experience into the field and using its tools critically to explain the entanglements of ableism, heteronormativity, and other structures of oppression that shape lived bodymind experience. Thus, crippling phenomenology involves understanding how ableism and heteronormativity work together, along with capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and other structures of violence to shape disability experience and, indeed, the possibility of one’s movement in and through worlds.⁷

Walking is one mode of moving through the world. In her conversation and walk with Sunara Taylor, Judith Butler describes walking as an interdependent activity supported by innumerable others who either make one’s walk possible or impede it:

[A] walk always requires a certain kind of [technique, a certain support. Nobody takes a walk without there being a technique of walking. Nobody goes for a walk without something that supports that walk, something outside of ourselves. And maybe we have a false idea that the able-bodied person is somehow radically self-sufficient. I think there’s an idea of self-sufficiency that might be a fantasy and a kind of an ideal norm that doesn’t actually suit any of us or help any of us think about how we move or why we move as we move. (2009, 187)

In response to Butler, Taylor adds, “That an able-bodied person can take a walk independently without anything else is sort of a myth. They do need certain ground, they

do need shoes, as you said, they need social support” (2009, 187). As this exchange between Butler and Taylor about walking underscores, the difference between an ‘I can’ and ‘I cannot’ (or ‘I no longer can’) is not reducible to any physiological fact about any individual body itself. The question of what a body can do—in this case, whether, how, and where any body can walk—can only be addressed critically, by attending to the social and political contexts that support or fail to support that walk. In its critical phenomenological approach, crip phenomenology attends to the ability-disability system structured by ableism in concert with other structures of oppression to shape the meanings of ability and disability, informing what bodyminds can do, where, when, and with whom.

Critical phenomenology, Lisa Guenther clarifies, is both philosophical and political. It focuses on the oppressive structures that make experiences possible and meaningful by revealing how they have circulated as commonsensical with an aim to political transformation of the world buttressed by those structures (Guenther 2020, 15). As such, critical phenomenology creates the possibility of “reclaiming the commons . . . [while] pulling up traces of a history that is not quite or no longer there—that has been rubbed out or consigned to invisibility—but still shapes the emergence of meaning” (Guenther 2020, 15). Politically, critical phenomenology is a creative practice that aims to transform the world (Guenther 2020, 15–16). *Critically* queer crip being in the world is at the heart of crip phenomenology.⁸

As I’ve been arguing, crip phenomenology is oriented toward affinities and solidarities between queerness and disability. As McRuer puts it, queerness in heteronormative contexts is perceived to be abnormal/diseased/sick/disabled, and disability in able-body-minded contexts is perceived to be perverse/queer (2020, 63). To crip phenomenology or offer a queer crip approach to lived bodymind experience is to strive to understand how ableism and heteronormativity work together, along with capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and other forms of structural violence, to shape those experiences. Furthermore, because both queer and crip reference experiences and critical-creative projects that trouble existing categories, crippling phenomenology troubles what is taken-for-granted about disability itself in worlds and within phenomenology. In its efforts to reveal and understand embodied legacies of multiple forces of normalization and naturalization, crip critique is attuned to how the imperative to embody ‘the normal’ entails heterosexuality, binary gender, and able-body-mindedness (McRuer 2018).

The crip in crip phenomenology, while certainly concerned with and accountable to the lived experiences of queer and disabled people, also attends to the edges of those categories, bodyminds that may not fit prevailing assumptions of what is meant when one speaks about disability, gender, or sexual identities and being-in-the-world and that defy ableist and heteronormative expectations. Critically

conceived, queer crips are not the bodyminds that are expected; they may surprise, confound, enrage, or shock, depending on the context of encounter. To shock, as Gayle Salamon building on Fred Moten explains, is to break with “the typicality of the world” (2018, 63–66). This break in typicality, I suggest, can occur in both dominant and non-dominant worlds, alienating body-minds that offend what’s taken as commonsensical about belonging in those worlds.

That said, crippling, like queering, is a method that aims to do more than critique restrictive norms; it also considers how queer crip being-in-the-world is a site of possibility for, to borrow from Ashon Crawley, otherwise-being, otherwise-worlds (2017, 24–25). As Alison Kafer explains, disability from a critically crip perspective is a site of questions rather than fixed definitions (2013, 12–13). To crip, Kafer points out, is to decenter without ignoring the role of diagnosis in defining disability. Building on these insights from crip theory, crip phenomenology is a philosophical and political practice that calls into question, even as it describes, lived experiences of queerness and disability and proposes a crippling of phenomenology itself by drawing on experiences, texts, figures, and traditions that are all-too-often ignored in the field’s mainstream.

The Philosopher’s Walk

To get a more grounded sense of crip phenomenology, I turn again to walking, in particular the philosopher’s walk. As this paper’s title and opening paragraphs indicate, my central focus is an example of a queer crip gait, in particular limping, as a generative site for thinking about how crip phenomenology troubles disability and queerness. To get there, I turn to walking, especially its association with thinking itself. It is this association of walking with thinking that I call the philosopher’s walk. By drawing attention to the philosopher’s walk, I hope to further clarify the distinction between ableist and queer crip understandings of philosophy itself. When one speaks of the philosopher’s walk, one must ask who is the philosopher who walks and what is the nature of the philosopher’s walk; what supports this walk and what is supported by this walk? What sort of thinking is made possible by the philosopher who limps? Limping, after all, interrupts and disrupts the fluid motion of normal/idealized walking. To the extent that walking and thinking are conjoined in the philosopher’s walk, might a philosopher’s limp queer crip the business-as-usual of philosophy itself, thus forging a path for philosophy done otherwise, an otherwise-philosophy, a philosophy one might call queer crip?

In his discussion of the significance of walking in the lives of various canonical philosophers, Frédéric Gros writes, “In all too many books the reader can sense the seated body, doubled up, stooped, shriveled in on itself. The walking body is unfolded and tensed like a bow: open to wide spaces like a flower to the sun, exposed

torso, tensed legs, lean arms” (2014, 19). For Gros, walking is an embodiment of unconstrained, free thought and, thus, of philosophy itself (2014, 23). Disability in his text (the seated, doubled up, stooped, shriveled body) does the work of making visible modes of embodiment that obstruct thought and, thus, the work of philosophy itself. In developing this claim, Gros relies not only on what various philosophers have said about the virtues of walking, but also on the habits of those philosophers who were known to be walkers.

A number of philosophers have extolled the virtues of walking, and their walking habits have been held up as the embodiment of those virtues. Every undergraduate philosophy student learns that the residents of Königsberg knew what time it was by taking note of Kant’s daily walks. Nietzsche also was known to take long, ambling walks to ease his pain. For both Kant and Nietzsche, walking was important because it sustained health or erased the effects of debilitating pain. For both, in other words, walking was a mode of disability management and elimination, an embodiment of an ableist belief that bodymind vulnerability can be conquered through individual acts of self-discipline.

Kant and Nietzsche’s ableist orientation to walking⁹ reflects a pattern that has been usefully critiqued by Gail Weiss and Gayle Salamon: the space of the world in which these figures move is but a neutral backdrop to their meanderings (see Salamon 2018; Weiss 2008). Walking, like sitting at their desks, is an act of solitary, uninterrupted thought. The world through which their bodies move is there to rejuvenate, fortify, and facilitate, but not disturb, their autonomous aims. The many ways in which the structures of the world support their walk are invisible because those structures do not obstruct their movement. The world is made by and for their movement; their walking an illustration of the ontological expansiveness of privileged bodyminds.¹⁰ In these venerated scenes of normate walking, the unrestricted, ambling body mirrors unrestricted powers of mind.

For Gros, books (or philosophical writing) express the physiology of the writer (2014, 19), and good books/philosophy reflect a healthy physiology born of fresh air and solitary brilliance, while bad books/philosophy reflect an unhealthy physiology tainted by the “miasmas” spread by of musty books of others (2014, 18):¹¹

Books by authors imprisoned in their studies, grafted to their chairs, are heavy and indigestible. They are born of a compilation of other books on the table. They are like fattened geese, crammed with citations, stuffed with references, weighed down with annotations. They are weighty, obese, boring, and are read slowly, with difficulty. . . . An author who composes while walking, on the other hand, is free from such bonds; *his* thought is not the slave of other volumes, not swollen with verifications, nor weighted with the thought of others. It contains no explanation owed

to anyone: just thought, judgment, decision. It is thought born of a movement, an impulse. In it we can feel the body's elasticity, the rhythm of a dance. Here is thought about the thing itself, without the scrambling, the fogginess, the barriers, the customs clearances of culture and tradition. (2014, 19–20, emphasis added)

No barriers, no fogginess, no accountability, no identity papers needed, no scrambling, no need to reroute—what privileged, ontologically expansive walking!

To be clear, the problem isn't the fact that these philosophers enjoyed their walks or that they had a habit of walking or even that walking made them feel better. Instead, I'm interested in how these walks figure in philosophy and the story of philosophy they tell. These philosophers' walks tell the story of philosophy's ableism insofar as they render invisible the structures that support those walks and maintain the myth of walking and thinking as solitary rather than interdependent activities. When taken as a foundation for the doing of philosophy, this style of walking materializes a philosophy that is, as Mariana Ortega points out, deeply ignorant of non-dominant ways of life and thus unable to understand the world despite its peacocking and posturing to the contrary—a philosophy that, as she puts it, has transformed a love of wisdom into a practice of exclusion (2016, 216).

I've characterized this conception of walking and its centrality to philosophy as ableist, but not for reasons one might assume. To begin with the most obvious, the accounts aren't ableist because they privilege walking rather than another mode of getting around, for example rolling. As Sunara Taylor puts it, there are many ways of going for a walk, and rolling is one of them (Butler and Taylor 2009, 186). So it's not the mere act of walking that makes these accounts ableist. Instead, it's *how* they walk, how the philosopher's walk is cast as the embodiment of an ontologically expansive cis straight white masculinity through distancing the walker from bodymind vulnerability and interdependency with others and the very ground on which they walk. More than a means to get from one place to another, successful walking, as these philosophers present it, is an exercise of mastery over mind and body and of disability elimination. Walking, in this case, functions as a movement in which the walker is normalized through the achievement of distance from disability. With each step, ableist conceptions of walking reinforce oppressive norms that enact modes of disability elimination, norms that naturalize and reinforce myriad forms of injustice against bodyminds that fail to embody them, thus underscoring the ableist conception of disability and disabled people as not belonging and undesirable.

Gail Weiss's description of the objectification of aging bodies in youth-obsessed cultural contexts is helpful here. Practices that aim to distance oneself from the aging of one's body and the elderly are mutually imbricated (see Weiss 2017). Weiss describes such practices as "founded, not upon a realistic assessment of the body's

changing capacities as it ages, but rather upon an idealized, static, youthful body image that makes the aging body a site of fear and disgust for oneself and for others” (2017, 205). Likewise, ableist conceptions of walking are informed by and enact a eugenic logic¹² of cure that misunderstands health as the absence of disability and thus characterizes disabled lives as lives not worth living. Lives deemed not worth living become lives not worth saving.¹³

Gayle Salamon’s phenomenological approach to the transphobic scrutiny of Latisha King’s walk offers an insightful analysis of a form of nonnormate walking that is simultaneously a site of embodied subjectivity and of gendered, ableist, racialized, and classist surveillance and violence. She writes,

Gender and walk are situated between [the] material body and the immaterial inhabitation of the body. The walk resides in the hinge between the volitional (where my feet take me) and the non-volitional (my walk as unintentionally disclosing my gender and sexuality). . . . Walking is an act that we perform with our habit body. The style that any walk will eventually develop is unavoidably inflected with gendered meanings, as well as racial and class [and disability, I would add] markers, which strengthen and deepen and become more pronounced in adolescence, developing like other characteristics of gender. (Salamon 2018, 32)

The significance of walking—its sounds and choreography—in normalizing contexts rests upon the naturalization of classed, racialized, gendered, and ableist binaries. In the context of these naturalized binaries, the appearance and movement of gender nonconforming bodies appear in dominant contexts as acts of aggression in their failure to be properly gendered (see Salamon 2018, 5). Salamon’s critical phenomenology of transphobic violence in response to Latisha King’s walk reveals how gaits that defy corporeal norms threaten worlds built around rigid conceptions of gender and the partitioning of space that aims to keep bodies in their “proper place.”

As Perry Zurn (2019) and Andrea Pitts (forthcoming 2021) point out, the transphobic violence that ultimately ended King’s life was also shaped by racism and ableism.¹⁴ A survivor of traumatic abuse, Latisha King was a black disabled trans girl in special education classes at E. O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, California. Brandon McInerney, the student who murdered her, was known to be drawn to and affiliated with white supremacist groups and had a reputation for targeting disabled students with verbal and physical violence. In contexts of white supremacy, misogyny, heteronormativity, ableism, classism, and transphobia, not all queer crip walks are the same. While gaits that defy corporeal norms create paths for lives lived otherwise and, thus, threaten worlds built around rigid conceptions of gender, they also situate bodies within what Sara Ahmed calls a “differentiated economy of stop-

ping,” an economy that creates different degrees of exposure to violence and different ways of moving and being stopped (Ahmed 2007, 161–162).

For Ahmed, the extent to which a bodymind aligns with normative whiteness informs the extent to which a body can move freely and pass unnoticed in a space. Whiteness, Ahmed argues, is not reducible to skin color. Instead, Ahmed describes whiteness as “a mobile body that ‘can do’ things” and feel “at home” (2007, 160). The mobility and comfort of whiteness allows it to be unnoticed, as if it is not even there. Unnoticed bodies are bodies that are habituated in (and thus, inhabit) and “sink” into a space because it anticipates them (Ahmed 2007, 156). Whiteness and heteronormativity are mutually reinforcing. As Ahmed puts it, “[C]ompulsory heterosexuality is the ground for the reproduction of . . . normative whiteness” (2007, 127). Bodies that are out of place in some way are stopped because, Ahmed contends, they are “not extended by the skin of the social” (2007, 161). That said, we don’t all inhabit a given social category in the same way, and the different ways we inhabit categories (like white and disabled) determines how, when, and where we are able to move through or are stopped in space (Ahmed 2007, 159). Ahmed’s analysis of the phenomenology of whiteness and of stopping usefully illustrates how mobility and comfort are political and vary between bodies, within and between social groups, and within different spaces.

The perceived violation of gaits deemed abnormal, a perception reflected and materialized in various forms of intense surveillance and reaction with which such gaits are met in dominant contexts, reveals how forces of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-body-mindedness work with whiteness and other forms of oppression to structure the world in ways that significantly harm queer crip bodies. Queer crip movement comes up against normatively hidden structures that differentially allow or arrest the movements of bodies and shape the ground and space one must navigate. Walking is not a mere physical accomplishment of the kinesthetic chain of hips, knees, ankles, and feet. In moving through worlds, queer crips are aware that walking is a kinesthetic relationship between bodies and worlds.

That said, how might we further understand queer crip lived bodies as corporealized resistance that creates possibilities for lives lived otherwise? After all, as Gail Weiss writes, “the body itself serves as the ‘narrative horizon’ through which human beings actively make sense of their lives” (2008, 6). Following Weiss, the lived body, while situated in and structured by oppressive systems, also refigures the ordinary, materializing another way to be and creating spaces of free movement. The body as lived is not simply a matter of biological-mechanical functioning. Lived in relation to and with others, embodied being in the world opens possibilities of transformed modes of being with others, otherwise-relationships.

In addition to revealing the oppressive structures that shape the lived experience of queer crip embodiment, a crip phenomenology attends to the resistant, transformative possibilities that are interdependently corporealized in queer crip modes of navigation and being in the world, modes of engagement that make possible queer crip flourishing. Building on Chris Cuomo's concept of ecological flourishing, Alexis Shotwell defines queer crip flourishing as an embodied affirmation of "an orientation toward unpredictable practices of capacity-increasing pleasures," an orientation that doesn't rely on "knowing precisely where we are going" (2016, 162). María Lugones's discussion of walking illegitimately is also useful here. For Lugones, an illegitimate walk is a walk that resists "the homogenizing language of the *therapeutizing* of politics, of expertise, of social control" (2003, 230, emphasis added) and "the confines of the normal" (2003, 231). I suggest that an important project for a crip phenomenology is to provide an account of how lives lived on edge and in excess of normalizing categories of gender, sexuality, appearance, and body-mind functioning defy and disrupt the eugenic logic of those categories, suggesting and affirming other ways to be.

Limping Along

So how might a crip phenomenology (which is always already queer) refigure gender, disability, and perhaps phenomenology itself? Given that phenomenology attempts to understand the structures of the world by beginning with lived experience and enmeshment in it, what cracks in suffocating normalcy are revealed by analyses that begin with queer crip orientation in the world?

To begin to grapple with these questions, I turn again to my gait—my limping swagger/swaggering limp—to try to get a sense of how queer crip embodiment challenges assumptions enshrined in prevailing categories of gender and disability.¹⁵ In part, a crip phenomenology of limping challenges the taken-for-grantedness of the distinction between able-body-mindedness and disability, drawing attention to how this distinction is secured through the naturalization and normalization of racialized binary gender and heterosexuality. Such efforts raise questions about who counts as disabled and what counts as disability in ways that trouble easy narratives offered in the name of and in opposition to mainstream approaches to disability rights.

Disability is a category that refers to wide array of bodies and minds, including as Susan Wendell notes, those with chronic pain and illnesses whose lived experience of disability is shaped by the episodic temporality of, for example, the flare up (see Wendell 2001). Also, as Alison Kafer (2013) and David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2015) argue, moving toward solidarity between disability and other justice movements requires a conception of disability that resists able-nationalism¹⁶ and

decenters the role of medical diagnosis and the experiences of global elites. Thinking with these insights, I suggest that a crip phenomenology refigures the meaning and scope of disability to include those whose lived experience and resulting self-understanding and navigation of the world has been significantly shaped by disability. This expansive conception of disability experience is central to crip theory's conception of disability as more than and not reducible to medical diagnosis or assumptions that constitute common sense assumptions about disability.¹⁷ In other words, a crip perspective troubles what we think we know about disability, including what we think we know about what disability is and who counts as disabled. For example, Nirmala Erelles offers a crip critique of the racialized, classed, and ableist operation of disability labels in schools where tracking disability (who counts as disabled) works against students of color to exclude them from the education and services they need (2014, 93–95). Thinking more expansively about disability lends itself to a critical phenomenology that reflects and is responsive to the diversity, lived complexities, and ambiguities of nonnormate corporeal experience in the world, rather than to a narrow, ultimately depoliticized understanding of disability based on presumed neutral medical diagnoses.

With this in mind, let's return to my gait, a gait that marks the queer crip mattering of my embodied navigation of the world. My limping swagger/swaggering limp is part of the sedimentation that shapes my lived experience and embodied being; it materializes what my body knows, offering an example of a habituated mode of bodily navigation and corporealizing the effects of congenital hip dysplasia, casting, bracing, and rehabilitation. While my gait might not “count” within a narrow and depoliticized understanding of disability, it is shaped by disability experience that continues to make my gait remarkable in normative contexts.

Even in a crowd or among strangers, I am not anonymous when I walk for reasons to do with gender and disability. When walking in public space—out and about, as it were—it is not uncommon for me to encounter a stranger's stare that first goes to my foot or leg and then takes in the rest of me, as if trying to put the pieces of a puzzle together in an effort to make sense of the non-commonsensual. Sometimes the starrer will ask what happened to me; sometimes the stare becomes a glare. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2009) points out, disability is structured, in part, by the stare. In limping along, I confess that it's difficult, if not impossible, for me to know whether the stare is directed at my limp or my gender nonconforming, swaggering occupation of space, but from a crip phenomenological perspective, both converge to shape how I am enmeshed in and navigate the world and thus my embodied self. The stare-glare directed at queer crip bodies in normate worlds registers our glaring presence in those spaces. Defying ready-made normate taxonomies, queer crip bodies are hypervisible disruptions in the normate flow of the world.¹⁸ In limping along,

I know when the record scratches. Nowhere to hide. Non-anonymous. Glaring, fabulous, fierce in our difference.

To limp is to fail in the embodied accomplishment of fluid motion through one's monstrous occupation of space. The limping-swaggering gender nonconforming butch body is a simultaneous embodiment of a too-muchness and not-enoughness. The not-enough here signaling how rigid binaries shape how bodies are surveilled in dominant and nondominant worlds. The not-enoughness also registers efforts to determine which bodyminds are disabled enough to count.¹⁹ Not butch enough. Not disabled enough. Not hip enough. Not enough hip. My limping-swaggering gender nonconforming butch body moves along the edges of worlds of sense. An account of embodied ambiguity that troubles presumed commonsensical meanings of disability and gender requires a crip phenomenology oriented toward that which lags behind when all the counting is done.

Limping doesn't have the structure of hesitation or lingering. Instead, its structure is closer to a faltering, lagging, or failing that is perhaps best captured by Elizabeth Freeman's notion of temporal drag, a queer temporal defiance of chrononormativity, that Freeman defines as a linear temporality in which the past is superseded by an always better present (2010, xii–xiii). From a queer crip perspective, chronormativity resonates with the ableist logic of cure. A crip phenomenology of a limping-swaggering queer crip gender nonconforming lived body offers insight about the too-much/not-enough lived bodies that denaturalize and unsettle gendered, racialized, and ableist presuppositions about the relationship between disability and cure. Ableist ideologies of cure are oriented toward the normal as that which always makes life better and conceive of disability as antithetical to this better life (see Clare 2017). But as queer crips know deep in our bones, orientations toward the normal won't cure what ails us. Understanding the lived experiences of queer crip bodyminds requires a crip phenomenology oriented toward ableism and its role in shaping experiences and worlds.

To borrow from Eli Clare (2017), queer crip being in the world is an embodiment of "beautiful imperfection," which can include a lived experience of ambiguity between cure and disability that complicates the meaning of both. My surgery aimed to cure me by fixing my hip and normalizing my movements. From a medical point of view, it succeeded because it eliminated the impairment that prevented me from walking, occasioning my movement from disability to ability. But walking is more than a physiological, coordinated accomplishment of an individual body's limbs, joints, and balance. That said, there is no walking, Butler reminds us, that is not at the same time a style of walking. And this, I suggest makes all the difference. From a queer crip perspective, the surgery failed spectacularly. Unspoken ableist and cisheteronormative assumptions imagined a certain style of walking for my

cured body, a walk that was “properly gendered” with no limping. When strangers ask if I’ve hurt myself, their response to my gait is premised on an assumption of disability’s temporary temporality in the aftermath of surgery and rehabilitation, that is, the expectation that I have been or will be cured. Every ambulatory accomplishment is taken as proof of disability elimination, the promise of cure. But such expectations are undone by the swagger that also places me outside the sphere of care and concern in ableist, cisheteronormative contexts, as well as the limp that could not be sawed, casted, braced, rehabbed, or willed away. Limping-swaggering along, I forge a path between disability and ability where I live, paths that rework and resist dominant spaces and meanings.²⁰ Limping-swaggering along, queer crip lived bodyminds create possibilities for otherwise-worlds.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 To provide a bit more context to Mairs’s claim, the full passage reads, “I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. . . . People—crippled or not—wince at the word *cripple*, as they do not at *handicapped* or *disabled*. Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger” (1986, 9). Carrie Sandahl discusses the resonances between the terms queer and crip, resonances grounded in the fact that both are reclaimed terms of disparagement and that their reclamation by people targeted by those terms reflects a radical critique of the politics of normalcy (2003, 26–276). Mairs’s use of swagger is a critically crip use that flaunts defiance and refusal of heteropatriarchal and ableist gendered norms, rather than superiority over inferiors as the term’s more standard definition implies. Building on this work, my description of my gait as a limping-swagger/swaggering-limp aims to draw critical attention ableist conceptions of disability as lack or tragedy (swaggering-limp) and heteronormative, ableist conceptions of masculinity in which butchness is conceived as mere imitation of real masculinity and masculinity is conceived as compromised by disability (see Halberstam 1998, 77; Ahmed 2006, 98; Finkelstein 2003, 311–312; and

Pastavas 2014, 211–212). My use of limping-swagger/swaggering-limp to describe my gait reflects a queer crip critique of the confluence of binary conceptions of gender and depoliticized, ableist conceptions of disability.

- 2 One of the purposes in this paper is to distinguish between a phenomenology of disability and a crip phenomenology. In part, this distinction highlights that the term “crip” is more than another word for disability. Rather, crip, like queer, is a term that calls into question the norms that define the terms of inclusion and exclusion within social categories, like disability, and is attuned to how ableism, racism, heteronormativity, capitalism, nationalism, patriarchy, and other systems of oppression work together to shape the meaning and lived experience of disability. Crip is a term that thinks expansively and critically about what disability is and who counts as disabled, politicizing disability rather than centering diagnosis. A phenomenology of disability focuses on disability as a pathological deviation from the norm. Cast as an example of deviation, the role of disability within a phenomenology of disability is to delimit and shore up, rather than call into question and critique, the nondisabled body as natural and normal. Within a phenomenology of disability, disability is an object rather than the subject of the phenomenological analysis. A crip phenomenology of disability is a critical phenomenology attuned to the mutually reinforcing structures of oppression that variously condition all experience, all bodily being in the world.
- 3 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson defines the normate as the “incarnation” of a culture’s regulatory ideal of the normal body (1997, 8; 2011, 23–24).
- 4 Leder defines dys-appearance as the body’s appearance “as thematic focus, but precisely . . . in a *dys*-state—*dys* from the Greek prefix signifying ‘bad,’ ‘hard,’ or ‘ill,’ and is found in English in words such as ‘dysfunctional’” (1990, 84). Leder contrasts the *disappearance* of the body as an absent state of the body (like blood circulation) that allows normal, healthy functioning and the body’s *dys-appearance* in which the normally absent body becomes present in ways that prevent normal being in the world. For Leder, the normal body is the healthy body, a conception that rests on an assumption that disability is an absence of health. He describes the body’s dys-appearance as the body becoming alien to and at odds with the self, resulting in the body’s engagement with the world that moves from the “I can” to “I no longer can” (Leder 1990, 81). Leder’s analysis of the absent body abstracts ability and disability from structures of oppression, rendering the “I can,” “I no longer can,” and the “I cannot,” depoliticized consequences of the state of the body itself. In this sense, Leder offers a phenomenology of disability rather than a crip phenomenology.
- 5 Leder presents a phenomenological account of lived experience; however, his discussion of dis-ability and dys-appearance reflects an ableist assumption according to which disability can only be lived as loss. By contrast, consider Eli Clare’s response to strangers who assume he would want or choose a cure: “After five decades of these kinds of interactions, I still don’t know how to rebuff their pity, how to tell them the simple truth that I’m not broken. Even if there were a cure for brain cells that died at birth, I’d refuse. I have no idea who I’d be without my trembling and tense muscles, slurring tongue” (2017, 5–6).
- 6 Here I recruit Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s reference to smuggling as a queer critical method (1993, 11).
- 7 María Lugones’s (1987) concept of multiple worlds of sense and experience and of how the self is different in different worlds is central to my thinking here. Worlds, for Lugones,

can be resistant, dominant, populated by few or many people, incomplete, and there can be worlds in which one is understood in ways that don't make sense to one and worlds where one's own frame of meaning is not in operation (10–12). Everyday experience for those who are oppressed, for Lugones, involves world-travelling and an understanding of how one is perceived in different worlds. A feature of privilege is that one is not required to world-travel for survival, and engages in world-traveling as a mode of tourism.

- 8 For a discussion of crip as a critical concept and practice see Kafer 2013, 12–13, 16–17 and McRuer 2006, 28–32.
- 9 In drawing a connection between Kant and Nietzsche in my discussion of the philosopher's walk, I am not suggesting that there aren't interesting and important philosophical differences between the two. For example, it would be interesting to consider how Nietzsche's genealogical approach to truth and morality might form an important ground for a critically crip philosophy. Nonetheless, a careful development of this view is beyond the scope of this paper. My critique of the ableism of the philosopher's walk in this section is not grounded in the works of specific philosophers (for example, Kant and Nietzsche). Instead, it is focused on how the walking habits of various philosophers has become part of a story told about Western philosophy, a story that makes a particular connection between walking with thinking, or the practice of good philosophy.
- 10 Shannon Sullivan defines "ontological expansiveness" as the lived spatiality of whiteness characterized by the presumed right to inhabit all spaces and be centered in them (2006, 38, 144–145).
- 11 Consider, by contrast, what Sara Ahmed says about the feminist ethics of citation. Far from being bogged down by the words of others, citation is feminist queer crip memory, personal and political (Ahmed 2017, 15–16).
- 12 Eugenic logic is Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's term for the ableist ideological conviction "that our world would be a better place if disability could be eliminated" (2012, 339–340).
- 13 This last point is starkly demonstrated by the ableist ableism of people who perceive COVID-19 as not their problem because they aren't in a higher risk category and thus conclude that mask wearing, vaccination, and social distancing aren't their responsibility. Meanwhile, people and places deemed more inherently vulnerable to COVID-19 contagion—old people, disabled people, poor people, black people, brown people, and Indigenous people, long-term care facilities, prisons, etc.—became national sacrifice zones in the U.S. in efforts to secure "public health." But, just as no one takes a walk without something or someone that supports that walk, no one lives without something or someone who supports one's living (e.g., agricultural laborers, grocery store workers, hospital cleaners, nurses, food delivery workers, nurse's aides, etc.).
- 14 My discussion of how racism, ableism, and transphobia shaped Latisha King's life and death draws on Perry Zurn's (2019) and Andrea Pitts's (forthcoming 2021) excellent analyses.
- 15 My analysis in this paper focuses on my gait as an example of queer crip embodied experience between disability and ability. Other disability studies scholars who have reflected on the meaning of their gait include Eli Clare (2017), Tobin Siebers (1998), and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018 and interviewed by Persaud 2018). Their accounts are brilliant and bring out different dimensions of crip navigation of the world.

- 16 Mitchell and Snyder define able-nationalism as the neoliberal “tactic of integrating a privileged [disabled] minority at the expense of the further abjection of the many,” a tactic that “relies on a binary between ‘giver nations’ and ‘beneficiary nations’” (2015, 44 and 52).
- 17 Gayle Salamon describes how common sense and shock work together. As she puts it, [A]n experience of shock enacts a break with common sense. But common sense is not merely a neutral ground that is disrupted by shock. It is that which disciplines the otherwise, brings it back when it has strayed from a collectively agreed upon course of deliberation or action. Common sense and shock thus work in concert, either for the purpose of establishing and enforcing norms or with the aim of challenging them. (Salamon 2018, 109).
- 18 For an insightful analysis of the connection between ableism and fluency, see Joshua St. Pierre (2017).
- 19 For crip perspectives on living with pain and gender identity, see Finklestein (2003) and Pastavas (2014).
- 20 For more on walking as a world-creating, resistant critical practice that challenges dominant meanings, see Zurn (forthcoming 2021) and Lugones (2003).

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