Book Review

Mara Mills, Rebecca Sanchez (eds), *Crip Authorship: Disability as a Method*, New York, New York University Press, 2023

REVIEWED BY GIUSEPPE ESPOSITO

Scuola Superiore Meridionale

giuseppe-esposito-ssm@unina.it

When I started reading this book, I approached the text trying to follow its sometimes "stumbling" and "stuttering" strut, meaning I was letting these very diverse, and yet very coherent contributions, decant during the day suggesting unexpected connections, after reading one or two chapters a day from the different sections (writing, research, genre/form, publishing, media). In a certain sense, this allowed me to connect with one important aspect, which is for sure a result from the expert assembling, but also a distilled essence of this book's methodology: although the organicity of proposed research, the collection stands out for its pluralism in style and arguments. Throughout all the sections, the political weight given to the term "crip", its theoretical and methodological implications, remain a central issue despite the vast diversity of narratives and frameworks. When coming to the internal debate within disability studies, we can certainly argue how terms and concepts connected to cripistemology – or its plural and intersectional manifestations (Johnson and McRuer, 2014; Banner, 2019) – in general, have extensively been used in disability critical studies in the last decades, both as a theoretical and political set of tools aiming at re-appropriation and empowerment, in an effort initially starting from disability activists - and we can say it naturally implies more or less engaged forms of "activism"- , and it recalls a substantial shift in how we shall look at "authorship" itself. Authorship is here the pivotal concept, around which the issues of researching, writing, publishing in academia spins, explored through the lenses of crip body/minds, where it also includes, for instance, non-binary and queer, black, African, Latino or Asian, indigenous points of view, disabled within any range, or simply dwelling in research fields looking at countercultures, liminal or "outcast" environments. The present contribution aims at deconstructing and reconnecting some of the topics exposed in this highly valuable collective publication: not that the separated contributions need any external intervention to show the coherence of the topics or the wisdom of the edition work, but it is part of our understanding concerning this text, that the material found here can be treated as a multifunctional tool to understand disability, its many aspects and its counterparts, and try to non-violently empower crip authorship and disability as a creative force, by tackling the idea of authorship as a able-oriented performative gesture.

The intent of this collective volume, expertly edited by long-standing disability advocates and scholars Mara Mills and Rebecca Sanchez, is to show how disability can function as a methodologic prism to perceive authorship issues and return them in a radically different way, finding natural intersections with a whole universe of critical studies representing organization studies in *diverse* manners (Boncori, 2022; Fritsch, 2015a, 2015b). Coherently with this research galaxies, insisting not just on the difference but how language and representation can *produce* debilitating environments, the persistence on the methodological aspect allows the scholars involved in this book to collect and tell experiences and research material from the "inside" of disability as a range – incorporating the epistemological difference implied in nuce of all forms of *disabilities* –, shifting the focus from potentialities instead of limitations, imposed by radically different and/or *crippled* perspectives. By this means, it is observed how disability can alter and dismantle method while generating *methods*, taking place in alternative dimensions of authorship, and tackling the neoliberal approach which too often tends to commodify research and writing, by ultimately making it politically aligned to mainstream, compliant and self-referred efforts in organization studies.

This volume collects those strands of theory that understand the creative force lying beneath the *crippled*, the *stuttering*, the blind or deaf, eventually placing social sciences research back in the field of resistant theory and practices. There is a strand of theory that understands disability to be a creative force, a spur, a method of non-aligned production. The mismatch between disabled body/minds and social environments leads to distinct and unrepeatably *crippled* ways of being, representing, and projecting these ways into research and "giving voice" (Alper, 2017) to these irreducible – and yet multicentric – points of view. Tobin Siebers explains the connection between disability and method by saying "disabled body changes the process of representation itself blind hands envisioned faces of old acquaintances deaf eyes listen to public television mild sign autographs different bodies require and create new modes of representation" (Siebers, 2008, p. 54). Authors like Hamraie and Fritsch (2019) encourage the crip approach to making and unmaking, referring "the non-compliant anti-assimilationist position" (Hamraie, 2017, p.99), furtherly suggesting the potential subversive energy of so-called cripistemology. They emphasize the practices of critical thinking, and creating research material and discursive worlds, ultimately revitalizing the field of otherwise regimented social sciences research (Mery Karlsson and Rydström, 2023). Another interesting perspective, which has reached the status of consolidated knowledge, recalls how the intersection between different fields of study, united by an anti-ableist approach, from post-colonial, to gender, to disability, may work as propeller fuel for all those arguments. Otherwise said, as Joanne Martin (2003) prophetically suggested years ago about the intersection between feminist and critical studies, so-called crip theory can provide an amazing opportunity to reshape critical studies, unite perspectives and eventually tackle systemic rigidities permeating both academy and society.

Both Mills and Sanchez have prolifically elaborated, in the last 20 years, around "Crip theory", insisting on paradoxes within technological advancements for the disabled (see for example: Mills, 2011; Whittaker et al., 2019), highlighting the empowering possibilities inherent to the increasing attention disabilities, both visible and invisible, have gathered in academia in the last decades, and how these approaches were capable of new and liberating representations of disability (Sanchez, 2017; Krentz and Sanchez, 2021; Dolmage, 2017a, 2017b) . In the words of

Rebecca Sanchez, presenting the book at Kampnagel Buchmesse in May 2023: "the idea for the book originated early in 2020 during Covid19 Pandemic, and it was about sharing knowledge and expertise related to disability, chronic diseases, quarantine, in using the hashtags 'disabled people told you'." (Sanchez, 2023, September 11ᵗʰ)

They invited scholars and academic friends to write essays about their experiences in writing, researching, publishing, or simply elaborating on social dynamics they're personally involved with, putting together 35 chapters: essays include Mel Y Chen on the temporality of writing with chronic illness; Remi Yergeau on perseveration; La Marr Jurelle Bruce on mad Black writing; Alison Kafer on the reliance of the manifesto genre on disability; Jaipreet Virdi on public scholarship for disability justice; Ellen Samuels on the importance of disability and illness to autotheory; Xuan Thuy Nguyen on decolonial research methods for disability studies; Emily Lim Rogers on virtual ethnography; Cameron Awkward-Rich on depression and trans reading methods; Robert McRuer on crip theory in translation; Kelsie Acton on plain language writing; and Georgina Kleege on description as an access and aesthetic technique.

They all start from the premise that disability is a creative force and method of non-normative production. The mismatch between disabled body/minds and social environments lead to specific ways of making, representing and being.

Probably one of the main questions this book raises, through its multi-layered structure, is: how does disability shape authorship? First, it challenges the assumption of normal, hyper-performative authorship. It is part of a multi-step inquiry: it talks about the writing process and creativity being impacted by disability and the methodology this impact is generating, both regarding merely theoretical fields and social dynamics happening outside of academia, within communities. As previously said, there is a mechanism of dismantling the normative concept of authorship itself, starting from the editing challenges to make the book available both in print and open access, to be used with screenreaders and openly accessible. Again, in the words one of the curators:

"Sometimes we overlook the labour in the process, we have crip aesthetics in different formats and technologies. The book tries to tackle the power imbalances and exclusionary codes in the publishing business. […] for this reason, it was important to us that authorship be published simultaneously in print and in an online Open Access format that is flexible for use with screen readers and also does not exist behind an academic paywall" (Sanchez, 2023).

By this means, authorship is once again "dismantled" in this process, deep to its core definition, questioning the polymorphic meaning of the term once it is devoid from authority, showing differences between a dictionary meaning and a legal one. In the western academic sense, the author is autonomous, creative, original, it signals and bestows authority, as the western legal sense authorship is also a form property ownership, meaning that an author is not only the creator of the original expression in a work, but is also an owner of its copyright. For a work to be copyrighted, for legal authorship to be granted, it must be fixed in a tangible, medium of expression which is a quote from the U.S copyright office but has similar definitions in European systems. A work an author can claim must take a form that can be copied: a page, an audio tape,

or a digital format; not all composition can be accommodated within this commodity version of authorship. For instance, the chapter authored by deaf and blind poet John Lee Clark, discussing the impossibility of translating protractile into image and sound-based media, highlights how, once it is transcribed to become copyrightable, much of the tactile language is lost in translation. This makes the original composition legally "lost" at it is irreducible to formats that copyrights holders can claim publication and distribution rights over, also considering braille-like formats are produced scarcely and for extremely limited circulation. This scarcity counteracts the plural implied in "crip" perspectives, as these allow account from non-assimilated territories and body and minds to discard the otherwise cumbersome outdatedness of old school organization studies. Crip does not have a legal definition, it is not a term under which people make legal or rights-based claims; it signals community affiliation and political resistance: these communities aim towards a larger collective reshaping of society, not necessarily indexing specific disability experiences, but *disabled* or crip as a different form of writing, researching, and living.

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