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Building a Community for Queer Disability Studies: Lessons from the Snail

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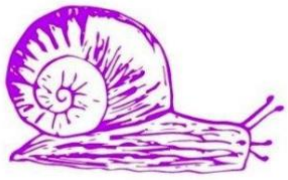
Abstract
This article describes the Queer Disability Studies Network, a space set up for Queer Disability Studies academics and activists to find solidarity, particularly those experiencing marginalisation due to queerphobia, transphobia, intersexphobia and ableism in Disability, Queer, Trans and Intersex Studies; and for ideas in these disciplines to inform one another. The network was established to oppose the institutionalisation of ideas that would delegitimise trans lives and identities within academia and provides a space of solidarity and resistance within the neoliberal-ableist university. The article provides an explanation of the origins of the network. From this it uses the network's snail motif to organise learnings from Trans, Queer, Intersex and Disability Studies into a set of 'lessons' for groups seeking to develop solidarities within academic and activist communities. These lessons raise critical questions related to concepts of 1) home, 2) temporalities and mobilities, and 3) embodiments and vulnerabilities. We conclude by discussing the implications of these lessons for practising solidarities and coalitional politics in contested times.

Keywords
Disability Studies; Trans; Queer; Intersex, Community; Transphobia; Ableism

Introduction

This article describes the Queer Disability Studies Network, a space set up for Queer Disability Studies academics and activists to find solidarity, particularly those experiencing marginalisation due to queerphobia, transphobia, intersexphobia and ableism in Disability, Queer, Trans and Intersex Studies; and for ideas in these disciplines to inform one another. The network was established to oppose the institutionalisation of trans exclusionary, or 'gender critical', ideas within academia. It is also a space of solidarity and resistance within the neoliberal-ableist university, wherein trans exclusionary ideas and ableism operate together, shaping which bodies and ideas are 'politically, historically and conceptually included' (Puwar, 2004: 8)

Our account is organised around the network's snail motif. The snail offers up features for discussion that help us frame queer, trans, intersex, and disabled experiences of academic and activist labour. These include a home it carries on its back, a distinctive mode and pace of transit, and a non-normative body (at least for those who are not snails). Echoing Morland's (2009) 'lessons from the octopus', which provides lessons about gender and sexuality by reflecting the lived realities of intersex people, we offer 'lessons from the snail' by presenting cross-cutting themes from Trans, Queer, Intersex and Disability Studies linked to concepts of 1) homes, 2) temporalities and mobilities, and 3) embodiments and vulnerabilities. We conclude by discussing the implications of these lessons for practising solidarities and coalitional politics in contested times. These sections follow an explanation of the origins of the network.



The QDS Snail

Backlash: Origins of the Queer Disability Studies Network

The Queer Disability Studies Network started in the UK in the context of a backlash against trans rights. In 2018, the UK government proposed a public consultation on reform to the 2004 Gender Recognition Act, which allows trans people to change the sex on their birth certificate. Multiple trans-hostile campaigning organisations, predominantly feminist and women's groups, organised against proposals to simplify the complicated and surveilled process of getting a Gender Recognition Certificate with a mechanism of self-determination (Pearce et al., 2020). Self-declaration, these groups argued, would remove rights supposedly afforded on the basis of sex, negatively impacting on women and girls, and lesbian, gay and bisexual people. These campaigns urged resistance to reform across the UK and fought legal challenges against trans-inclusive organisations, especially those that access public funds and support self-declaration. 'Gender critical' or trans-exclusionary feminist academics, who defend gender and sex essentialism, and erroneously frame progress for trans people as threatening or dangerous, provided legitimacy and respectability to these arguments.

Free speech and academic freedom have become a key location for such campaigns. In 2019, over thirty gender critical academics in the UK signed an open letter arguing that their freedom was threatened by the Stonewall Diversity Champions scheme, a programme which supports employers to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ issues. Phipps (2020: 144) notes that one of the problems the letter identified was guidance to 'ask the pronouns' of students. She reflects that 'this is bourgeois feminism rooted in disdain for those who think and live differently, whose bodies are not easily assimilated to capitalist production and reproduction' (Phipps, 2020: 145). Like conservatism, Phipps notes, reactionary feminism is 'deeply ideological in its policing of 'appropriate' gender and sex' (145) and pronouns have become an easy target of attacks from a range of political standpoints. Phipps (2020) also notes ideological continuities between gender critical campaigns against 'gender ideology' and the far right, highlighting affiliations between feminists and white supremacist, anti-abortion and anti-LGBT groups in the US and the UK. Since 2019, universities have become a focus in the campaign against Stonewall. For example, in 2022, University College London (UCL) formally cut ties, claiming its membership of Stonewall's programmes could inhibit academic freedom and discussion around sex and gender. The decision by UCL's management was made despite their EDI Committee, the LGBTQ+ Equality Steering Group, and OUT@UCL voting to maintain involvement with Stonewall. Whilst these arguments weaponise 'academic freedom', in effect they contribute to an already inhospitable environment for many marginalised academics and their research, narrowing opportunities for intellectual inquiry.

Gender critical ideas have been articulated particularly strongly where certain populations are portrayed as 'vulnerable' or institutions (like schools, hospitals, and prisons) are deemed to be necessarily organised by 'sex' (Hines, 2021). Gender critical thought imagines itself as a

vanguard protecting and safeguarding these locations from 'gender ideology'. One example of this in Disability Studies, an area which the Queer Disability Studies Network seeks to contribute to, positions disabled and neurodivergent children and young people as particularly 'vulnerable' to peer persuasion that they are transgender (so-called 'social contagion') (Serano, 2017).[1] Arguments about these groups have been central to campaigns to stop information about trans people being discussed with school-aged children.

In the Queer Disability Studies Network, we seek to consolidate justice for trans and disabled people. We reinforce others who stress that these pernicious arguments treat trans people in pathological terms, whilst they also simplify concepts of transition, underplay the difficulties trans young people face accessing health care, and deny, on ableist and sanist grounds, disabled young people's agency in making choices about their bodies and identities (Serano, 2017; Ashley, 2019). Trans inclusive advocates seek solidarity and conversation between trans and disability studies rather than reject alliances between disability and trans movements (Author A, 2018).

It was partly this backlash against trans rights that led us to develop the Queer Disability Studies Network. The backlash has threatened to destabilise shared spaces of academic labour, like academic journals, and raised questions about who is at 'home' in these spaces, and who feels threatened or unsafe (Hines, 2021). Our concern has been with the significant burden that

[1] Brusnkell-Evans and Moore's work on transgender children, which promotes the idea that transition is 'physically and psychologically dangerous and abusive' (cited in Yergeau, 2019), portrays 'transgender lobbyists' as 'relentlessly promot[ing]' the idea that children can be 'born in the wrong body', pushing children and young people into medical transition (Pearce et al., 2020). Moore's writing - strongly opposed by many trans people and those working in trans and disability studies (see, for example, Slater and Liddiard, 2018; Pearce et al., 2020) - also contends that an affirmative approach to care, which respects each individual's knowledge of themselves and their gender, prevents a 'deeper listening' = around trans identity.

the backlash of institutionalised transphobia places on trans, queer and other marginalised academics and students, both in discreet institutional contexts, and when doing public-facing engagement and 'impact' work (Pitcher, 2017). This hostile and draining environment prevents some people from doing their work effectively, and is pushing others out of the profession or their education programmes entirely. There has been a conspicuous absence of institutional support or recognition of this growing problem. Through building this network we propose the importance of building supportive scholarly communities, drawing on insights from trans, queer, and disability theory. In this paper, we explore how questions of academic 'home', community, and solidarity remain intensely political, especially to trans, queer, intersex, and disabled scholars who encounter backlash as well as the barriers of neoliberal ableist institutions.

A Space for Snails: Creating the Queer Disability Studies Network

This section explores ideas central to the formation of the Queer Disability Studies Network. Drawing on literature in Trans, Queer, Intersex and Disability Studies, which include submissions to a month-long event that launched the network in 2021: 'Questions in Queer Disability Studies', we offer lessons in relation to three areas of academic practice: unpacking 'home', developing alternative temporalities and mobilities of scholarship, and recognising diverse bodies.

Unpacking Home

Home speaks to the shell that a snail carries on its back, a protective, defensive space and support structure that houses a soft body, but which is also fragile and possible to break. Michalko (1999) characterises 'home' as conveying a range of experiences: a sense of fit and familiarity with a place and the people in it; recognition that oneself and certain others 'belong'

there; and a knowledge of the structures, routines and conventions that make up a place. Drawing on his experience of blindness, Michalko also describes how homes can be organised around norms that, to some, are exclusionary. He asks, how does one who feels at home with blindness 'describe themselves as belonging in the homeland of the sighted world?' (Michalko, 1999: 101). Such ideas of home - of safety, vulnerability, and staying and departing - speak to familiar narratives about queer, trans, intersex, and disabled life. For many disabled people, the home may be a refuge, or a place of inaccessibility and inadequacy. Home, as Malatino (2020, 42) describes, can accommodate trans and queer care labour, but also serves as a 'site of rejection, shunning, abuse and discomfort'. Some may feel 'out of place' at home, and may choose to - or are forced to - depart from there, albeit sometimes snail-like, carrying bits of 'home' with them.

For many of us, Queer, Trans, Intersex or Disability Studies may not be our primary disciplinary space; our 'homes' are dispersed as we are likely to work in other departments such as Education, Sociology, English, History, and so on. Disability, Queer, Intersex and Trans Studies are often interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary spaces, which exist betwixt and between other disciplines. Our direct departmental colleagues, therefore, may not be working from the same perspectives regarding trans, queer, intersex or disabled people's lives, and we may feel that our home - or sense of belonging - is not departmental, particularly if our departments perpetuate heteronormative, transphobic or ableist practices and narratives. In addition, for many people in the neoliberal-ableist academy, our time in any one department may be fleeting (and exploitative), as universities rely on short-term and zero-hours contracts. For example, Stamp (2021), a trans Disabled student, describes being urged to 'go home' from their degree at a time when illness meant they struggled to 'keep up' with academic 'clock time'. The assumption that a safe 'home' existed elsewhere evidenced how the idea of the academic

department as 'home' was conditional on them performing to a set of ableist standards (see also Pereira, 2021). Against this backdrop, we may hope that Queer, Trans, Intersex or Disability Studies are places where we can rest from the heteronormativity, transphobia or ableism that exist in departments or wider disciplinary spaces.

Yet, two controversies linked to the field of Disability Studies complicate the picture of disciplinary fields focused on social justice as spaces of respite. In both cases, decisions made by academics in positions of authority in their own field were contested by academics upholding social justice issues. The first relates to the editorship of the journal *Disability & Society* and the proximity of the Editor-in-Chief, Michele Moore, to gender critical ideas.[2] A petition started by Melanie Yergeau (2019), signed by nearly 1000 people, called for Moore's resignation and committed not to review for, publish with, promote or subscribe to *Disability & Society*. Later, an open letter by Ryerson University's School of Disability Studies shared concerns about the eminence and reach of the journal and the impact these 'hateful' views may have on the field, particularly if the journal was 'used to support an overtly transmisogynist, transphobic, ableist and saneist platform' (Ignagni et al., 2019). Moore's position, they argued, is 'not compatible with the broad ethical principles of disability studies'. Calls for Moore to resign led to at least six members of the executive board and 30 editors departing from the journal, and many researchers announcing their decision to withdraw submitted articles in solidarity. Yet, at the time of writing, Moore still remains in post, and as such various disability, trans, queer and other relevant

[2] Moore (cited in Slater and Liddiard, 2018) argues that 'alliances should not be made between the disabled people's movement and the transgender movement'; focusing her concerns on paternalistic understandings about disabled young people's vulnerabilities to being 'transgendered' (as we described earlier).

research communities have described their loss of trust in the journal's ability to work respectfully and impartially across the intersections of disability and trans research.

The second example relates to editorial practices and decisions in the creation of the 6th edition of the key Disability Studies text, the *Disability Studies Reader* (Davis and Sanchez, 2023.). Criticisms, made in an open letter signed by 22 of the collection's authors[3], were reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Gluckman, 2021). In the letter, authors publicly addressed the editor and publishers for their exploitative treatment, particularly of 'authors of colour, women, queer, trans, and nonbinary authors, authors from the global south, and young scholars'. The open letter highlighted that chapters focusing on queerness, transness, race and gender were put at the back of the book and these authors were treated 'as supplemental, even interchangeable', highlighting the peripheral position of this work within Disability Studies (Gluckman, 2021). Amongst a list of demands, they called for 50% of the book's profits to be donated to disability justice organisations led by disabled people of colour.

Disability Studies may provide something of an academic home for a number of people, but this feeling is not guaranteed - and there will be other examples of contestation and exploitation in the discipline beyond those that we have given (see for example Bell, 2010; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Schalk and Kim, 2020). Other fields are not without such entanglements: despite our commitments, social justice and identity-based disciplines - including Trans and Queer Studies - routinely perpetuate forms of injustice, including ableism (Slater and Liddiard, 2018). It is notable that in both examples above, calls for change often came from

[3] The letter is available here https://docs.google.com/document/d/1L7Z7mLT00YeCzwOR2zx25DbwFFw99-f1HvlA5rHpY6k/edit?fbclid=IwAR1fZYlA7r9Ri8XIlSOIA7BwSxhrIt8fKNSAbPhgOAFm8x8NpoRXacuAtg8

those already marginalised within the discipline. Resistance to change, however, often came from privileged networks of support for those in positions of influence. This maps onto a perception that because influence is earned through past contributions to a field, particularly with respect to forming and embedding dominant perspectives, it is right and proper for people in positions of influence to have 'ownership' over decisions that gave shape to the field (i.e. it is their property, their home). Such a notion, however, relies on perpetuating the myth of meritocracy, rather than interrogating why particular players come to inhabit those dominant positions in the first place.

Whilst ownership and boundaries within and across academic homes can create an important sense of responsibility and accountability, there is also a potential for territorialism and jurisdiction over shared spaces. Callard and Fitzgerald (2015, 85-86) highlight that the notion of academic disciplines 'maps intellectual inquiry on to the taken-for-granted boundaries of relationships between public and private space' and on to taken-for-granted understandings of private property. They ask:

> 'What would change, for the kinds of projects that we are trying to bring into being, if we were to think through very different accounts of property, of home, of migration, of arrangement, and of distinction? What if we were to recall, for example, the commons that preceded those strong fences? What if we were to turn to forms of community relation, and of being in-common, that refused – for good and for ill – the always-assumed bourgeois propriety of neighbourliness?'.

Examining conflicts in social justice fields, like Disability Studies, compel us to reconsider the safe illusions of 'home', and to ask who gets to feel at 'home'. More directly, we ask how trans disabled scholars can feel 'at home' in a community that upholds trans exclusionary ideas. Following Callard and Fitzgerald (2015: 85), we also ask what forms of community and academic commons are needed to include those who are invested in an academic space, but find themselves at the margins. What does a commitment to community mean for how academic spaces are organised? Further, in our mission to find shelter from hostility, is it also possible to create a distinct community and discipline that avoids reproducing 'those strong fences' or borders which demarcate inclusion and ownership, when - regardless of good intentions - building a shelter could also risk creating other forms of surveillance and segregation?

Rethinking Temporalities and Mobilities

In bringing together Queer Disability Studies as a formation of multiple disciplines and activist histories we draw on the connections made by other scholars and activists who speak within and across Queer, Trans, Intersex and Disability Studies to make space for those not solely singular disciplines to speak to each other. These connections and relationships make up the background from which it is possible for the Queer Disability Studies Network to attempt to make space for itself, and to create a new kind of 'academic' home as a reflection of a scholar-activist commitment to fashioning inclusive spaces. By drawing on scholarship from within and across these areas, including reflecting on contributions to the network's first event, we critically examine how work is organised in ways that advantage or disadvantage certain people by shaping how they move through academic spaces, and by determining who can 'keep up'.

One such example of this foundational work is found in temporality. In acknowledging that chrononormative clock-time does not account for a range of body-minds and experiences,

temporality offers an alternative approach that embraces doing time differently. Kafer (2013: 34) teases out the relationship between crip time and queer time, arguing that 'queer time is crip time, and that it has been all along'. She draws out the relevance of crip time in Halberstam's earlier (2005) development of queer time with its focus on AIDS community building; reimaging life schedules; and refusals to productivity. However, Kafer takes this queer temporality further, offering a queer-crip time that calls for continual constructing and reconstructing of crip futures. This focus on queer-crip time, or qrip time, as temporalities that are intrinsically linked and require rethinking chrononormative expectations to embrace the possibilities of futures across diverse queer and disabled body-minds is found in work across Queer and Disability Studies (Kafer, 2013).

A trans temporality has emerged, highlighting the ways that trans lives are 'constituted by yet exceed normative temporalities' (Amin, 2014: 219). This develops the possibilities of queer-crip/qrip time in new ways. Many of these literatures draw on the relationship of trans temporalities through waiting and anticipation in relation to access to healthcare which speaks back to the crip time narratives (Kafer, 2013). In a different approach, many intersex activists seek to use narratives of waiting to delay early infant surgeries. Garland and Travis (2020) name this process 'deferability', highlighting the ways in which it is a strategy that aims to counter medicine's use of chrononormative temporalities to promote surgical interventions. However, Morland highlights that these chrononormative framings do not reflect lived realities for intersex people and suggest they are subject to a 'disjointed temporality' (Morland, 2009: 191) due to unpredictable surgical procedures. The influence of chrononormative desires of medical professionals coupled with the lengthy waiting times for healthcare highlight the ways that trans, intersex, and crip time speak to each other. Although less is drawn out of these explicit

connections, some scholars make them clear. Pyne (2021: 356) in particular offers a 'cripping trans time through autistic disruption' to consider the possibilities of a crip trans time.

In an academic context, there are wider institutional chrononormative pressures of neoliberal-ableist institutions. The Questions in Queer Disability Studies Launch event hosted responses that spoke to temporalities, both in a wider sense as an experience of 'crip time' and in relation to the organisation of academic labour. For example, Tadman (2021) engaged explicitly with time as a subject matter and in form through film. Speaking to labour dynamics, time and concepts of productivity in academic work, Pereira (2021) highlighted how the encroachment of neoliberal ideas in academic settings has heightened the sense that one needs to 'perform' and 'endure' to survive. Resisting the demand to be 'constantly 'on', to work and be available all hours and to indicate productivity using metrics and individual measurements', Pereira calls for a politics of refusal in rest. This might involve saying no, and taking more time, but it also involves recognition that academic labour is interconnected:

> "knowledge production relies on vast networks of collaboration, interaction, sharing of ideas and colleagues who provide the time and space so that research can be conducted, to name a few. All types of knowledge production, regardless of discipline, require engagement with either previous work, research participants who give generously of their time and energy or artefacts that have been produced by others."

Pereira thus seeks a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between collaboration and achievement. But this works against the logics of 'clock time' as collaboration also means adapting to the different body-minds of those in place, or who are seeking a place: adapting and,

where necessary, slowing down. However, this event did not always produce slow reflections on submitted pieces. Trans-hostile responses to the release of submissions which focused on the relationship between Trans and Disability Studies created an unwanted urgency as we considered how to keep ourselves and contributors safe if this were to grow in hostility and attention. This unwanted urgent time felt in opposition to our intended desires for snail time and pace for engagement. We deliberately wanted to think beyond an event as a moment fixed in time and space, and we want to keep being part of those conversations as hybrid events and online working already seem to be on the decline.

Cutting across queer, trans, intersex, and disability temporality, or crip time, there are clear relationships across ideas of possibilities and imagined futures. We embrace the work of slow scholarship advocates as forms of feminist resistance to those pressures and constraints (Mountz, et al, 2015). However, we acknowledge that slow scholarship feels more possible for some academics than others and those most precariously employed may feel more temporal pressures (The Res-Sisters, 2017). We are drawn to Lau's (2019:18) work on slowness, disability and academic productivity, which seeks to place 'slow scholarship [as] a collective project to remake the university with an ethics of care'. In advancing these calls for slow scholarship from a queer disability perspective we suggest that making time is essential academic practice to account for all body-minds that academic institutions encounter.

Research is made up of processes that take time and as such it is the responsibility for institutions, such as funders and universities, to make time for that work (Humphrey and Coleman-Fountain, 2023). The essential inclusion of diverse body-minds as researchers and research participants requires embracing snail time and snail pace for such inclusion. This work of slowing down is also the collective work of academics to make time for each other. Leave no

snail behind! It takes time to think through and establish safe and inclusive event organisation (and research participation). This work requires us to plan and anticipate the inclusion of diverse body-minds. The burden of asking for access should not be more work for disabled attendees. There will always be contextual and specific work for inclusion (and especially for safety in current contexts) that may be more individualised but this is also work of building in time collectively. This is ongoing work that the aims of the Queer Disability Studies Network and emerging reflections speak to. In creating a space and a time for Queer Disability Studies, our asynchronous launch event, and ongoing commitment to this emerging/emergent discipline, allows for us to speak back to this work in constructing possibilities of queer-crip-trans futures in time, or outside of time as necessary.

Bodies and vulnerabilities

In thinking about bringing together a community, our attention has not only been on shared times and spaces, but also the diverse bodies that inhabit that space. Our motif is helpful here too: the snail is the subject of curiosity and disgust. Its hybrid body – at once soft and hard – secretes mucus, leaving a 'slime trail' coating on the surfaces it has moved across, as well as the exposed soft parts of its own body. Ideals of normality cast certain bodies as disruptive, betraying morphological expectations (Shildrick, 2002: 2). Grosz (1996: 56) describes those who have historically been categorised as 'freaks' for the purpose of voyeurism and entertainment – many of whom were disabled, gender non-confirming, or intersex – as 'simultaneously and compulsively fascinating and repulsive, enticing and sickening'. This voyeurism has long been an issue in academic research, whereby trans, queer, intersex and disabled people have been positioned as the objects of study, rather than producers of knowledge, i.e., those who are doing the research, or as collaborators and advisors on studies (Vincent, 2018). Thus, these groups are

often rendered 'vulnerable' or 'high-risk' participants by institutional ethics committees, despite the failure to support or safeguard researchers with shared identities. This overlooks the oppressive and ableist climate in which research takes place: a matter of ethical concern for all parties, not only for participants.

As we have described, the current backlash against transgender rights is an important backdrop for the development of this network. Trans activism, teaching and research have become subjects of hostile discussion (Hines, 2021; Pearce et al., 2020). Academic spaces also have a long history of (re)producing ableism, pushing the expertise and knowledge of disabled people to the margins (Brown and Leigh, 2020; Dolmage, 2017). We are interested in ways of acknowledging vulnerability in this climate, whilst also building a space to insulate and resist against harm. Just as the snail's soft body is protected from the environment and predators by its strong shell, we envisage this network as a space to shelter, by sharing research stories and survival strategies for trans, queer and disabled early career and junior academics, who research personal things in a precarious and marginalising context (Pearce, 2020: 820).

Contributors to our launch event, such as Pereira (2021) and Atkinson (2021), described the need for spaces that are accessible and inclusive of a range of embodiments and identities. Their concern was not only with ableist, queerphobic or transphobic spaces, but with how financialisation and casualisation are re-engineering academic institutions as sites of insecurity, workload intensification and competition. While academic institutions may present themselves as inclusive and as committed to enabling scholarly representations of diversity, those who get to create that knowledge are often those who are more 'able' and who more readily 'fit in', or as Pereira says, those who are closest to Puwar's 'somatic norm'. Standards of the perfect body which insist on 'consistency, predictability and self-transparency' (Shildrick 2002: 73) deny

corporeal vulnerability, and 'further strengthens the othering of those whose bodies fall short'. These expectations of boundless capacity, pliability and compliance are routine. For example, researchers, particularly those early in their careers, are also expected to be mobile and able to pursue short-term contracts across the country or the globe to maintain a foothold in the sector.

The implications of this, as Stamp (2021) argues, is the gradual marginalisation and exclusion of disabled, trans, and queer scholars whose bodies or lives are seen as making them too 'complicated' for scholarly labour. This results in both the expulsion from, or non-admission into, academia, or in some researchers' decisions to withdraw. Whilst these conditions are deeply unjust and avoidable, removing oneself from this sector may unfortunately be a commendable and necessary route to self-preservation. Like the snail as it withdraws its whole body into its shell when resting or defending itself from danger, some scholars may also need to disengage. These realities are not unattached to ableism, or hostility to trans or queer identities. As Stamp notes, higher education institutions run on norms of 'clock time' and are populated by in-groups who set unspoken rules that catch 'others' out. This can make them inaccessible to many queer and disabled students whose embodiments and lives are treated as barriers to being 'included'.

These contributions speak to other themes of the launch event: 'Representation and Absences' referenced how different institutions have rendered queer, trans and disabled people and their stories silent or invisible (see Queer Disability Studies Network, 2021). It is to these matters that many other contributors responded creatively, imagining new ways of organising academic labour around a multitude of embodiments and identities, accommodating different bodies' needs and addressing the desires for collective support and solidarity (Cooper, 2021). This also includes reflection on the different sites that bodies are made comfortable and asking who is omitted by the convention of formal communal spaces (offices, conferences, lecture

theatres). Cooper (2021) describes their zine-making as a queer and crip use of the bed, foregrounding the production process in their messy bedroom whilst making 'the seams, the joins' of their work visible. Their engagement in scholarship is in part shaped by the time they spend in bed, feeling unwell. This is both a response to their bodily requirements, and a rejection of labour norms.

There is a long precedent of the use of the home – particularly the bed – in disability activism, scholarship, and creativity (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018: 12). However, the (in)accessibility of conventional work environments and the significance of remote work has received new attention since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. We see this starkly now in 2023, after two years of periodic national lockdowns enforced by governments to lower rates of transmission and widespread working from home. In the current strive to return to 'normality', remote participation in academic events, work meetings, and community and political organising is declining once more. This leaves many disabled people and others who are especially vulnerable to severe illness as a result of Covid-19 more isolated than ever, despite their long-standing attempts to create more accessible ways of communicating and congregating prior to the pandemic. Community may sometimes need to be accessed from home, perhaps from one's bed - as Piepzna-Samarashina (2018: 21) writes, 'writing from bed is a time-honored disabled way of being an activist and cultural worker'. 'Home' in the physical sense of the word may be the location, but zines, newsletters, forums, Zoom calls, Whatsapp chats, Facebook Groups and Discord Servers, may be the site of belonging. Coalitional politics are critical in our approach to inclusive and accessible scholar-activist communities and spaces. For example, in Thornton's (2021) contribution to our launch event, he noted that, as transphobia has utilised the language of contagion, trans scholars may have felt tempted to stress their 'normality' and 'healthiness'. The

problem with this strategy is that some bodies remain defined as unwanted, situated at the margins of institutional life.

Practical Lessons for the Queer Disability Studies Network

In building the Queer Disability Studies Network, we have asked, what kind of space is the network? One response could be that the network aims to represent an existing or emerging field of Queer Disability Studies, assuming that its principal concern is with a body of academic knowledge. While we draw out cross-cutting lessons from Trans, Queer, Intersex and Disability Studies, we do not claim that Queer Disability Studies is a new field, but neither are we sure that it is *already* a field. A plethora of academic literature, art and activist work sits at the intersections of queerness and disability, but, from our positions as social scientists in the UK at least, we feel there is little in the way of a space which allows for activism, art and scholarship, to come together at the intersections of Queer, Trans, Intersex, and Disability Studies in order for that field to fully emerge.

In another respect, the Queer Disability Studies Network aims to ask who academic spaces are for, who is present, who is represented, and who gets to have a say. This focuses attention on the actors that are present in a space. Puwar (2004: 1) notes that 'space is not a fixed entity' but exhibits potential for transformation as actors who have been 'historically or conceptually excluded' seek entry and position within a space. Puwar's focus is on how feminised and racialised bodies have sought to occupy space in social orders constructed around a white and male 'somatic norm', among which she includes universities and other academic spaces as historic bastions of this norm. She asks how normative bodies occupy positions of privilege in ways that determine the identity of a space and give those same bodies a neutral

symbolic charge, while 'other' bodies are rendered 'matter out of place', their very presence a 'renegade' act against the somatic norm (Puwar, 2004: 12).

In the midst of a backlash against trans rights and an expansion of the neoliberal ableist university, the Queer Disability Studies Network acknowledges the importance of space for trans, queer, intersex and disabled people, whose bodies have been marked by difference, and who have not been 'politically, historically and conceptually' present (Puwar, 2004: 8). For example, the network challenges the use of Disability Studies critiques as ways to delegitimise trans identities and embodiments. It acknowledges trans disabled people's understandings of their bodies and lived experience. Further, it recognises the way that Disability Studies itself has been shaped by a pervasive whiteness (Rizvi, 2021) whilst also often being dominated by able-bodied researchers who have more easily navigated the competitive workplace dynamics that lead to secure academic positions and roles on academic journals and at conferences. Similarly, the invisibility of and hostility towards disability within queer spaces means we need to ask questions about how Queer, Trans and Intersex Studies engage with disabled researchers and activists. More broadly, we acknowledge the impact of the entire institutional edifice of the neoliberal-ableist university and the use of the state by conservative activists to push a 'free speech' agenda as constructing a hostile and draining environment for queer, trans, intersex and disabled scholar-activists. In all this, following Puwar, we ask whose bodies are normative in academic spaces, and whose are 'out of place'.

There is a need for academic spaces that promote collective solidarities. Here is a space explicitly about the importance of solidarity as a way to challenge exclusionary practices in academic spaces, and to resist the erosion of inclusive space through the multiplication of barriers and a politics of backlash. The network offers what Pearce (2020: 809) calls a

'supportive community of scholarship' by acknowledging the importance of academic and activist homes - or other places of belonging - and by asking who contributes to the formation of critical scholarship; how considering the pacing and organisation of academic and activist labour is crucial for inclusion; and how precarity, marginalisation and erasure are experienced when encountering oppressive institutions.

To return to what kind of space the Queer Disability Studies Network is, we suggest that it embodies three features. The first is that it is *a space of resistance* against exclusionary ideas and practices. The second is that the network has to work from spaces of institutional privilege outwards (Hale, 2008), respecting and acknowledging the important work being done by scholar-activists who have a less secure position in academia, or who choose to work from the outside. Practically, it should use the 'pockets of possibility' (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021) that come with academic affiliation to redirect important resources to those marginal spaces in demonstrating anti-ableist and anti-transphobic solidarity. Atkinson (2021) states these requirements in his discussion of the future of the Queer Disability Studies Network. He questions the dominance of the university as the primary site of scholarly activity and calls for those who 'are more firmly within the academy… to try our best to promote the work' of those many scholars who are locked out of these spaces. By doing so, he says, queer disability scholarship would be more radical and less restrained by the limitations created by current institutional structures.

The final feature is that it is a *community of solidarity and support*. This means that it should embody an ethos of care and mutual aid, resisting, as Pereira (2021) argues, the competitiveness of much institutional academic work and building more collaborative, supportive structures that promotes access and are inclusive of a range of bodies and needs.

These ideas are all inspired by the scholarship that we describe above, and will help us move forward with this network.

A Call to Snails

Whilst the authors of this article are especially familiar with the UK context, we argue here that international solidarities and coalitions are vital. Our ideas and experiences are inevitably bounded by geographies and cultures, and they do not represent the range of ways that people's lives, body-minds and work are shaped by queerness and disability. An international and inclusive Queer Disability Studies Network needs to be collaborative, but also pliable and ready to grow and evolve in response to a diversity of perspectives and needs. We seek to create a space for allegiances between those feared, demonised, and – sometimes simultaneously – construed as vulnerable. Thus, we incorporate a need to resist intersexphobia, sexism, racism, and classism, as well as ableism, queerphobia and transphobia as it occurs within Disability, Queer, Intersex, and Trans Studies. The composition of our group must always be fluid, and we must be willing to reflect and challenge ourselves within our own work and beyond.

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