Title of article: Chronic Pain, Choreography and Performance: Practices of Resilience

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Abstract: This article focuses on resilience and chronic pain in the context of choreography and performance. Through critically-creatively reflecting on my practice-as-research project, *Ecologies of Pain,* I explore practices of resilience that emerge from turning towards and working creatively with chronic pain. I draw from two strands of the performance research - collaborating with disabled artist Raquel Meseguer and devising a new autobiographical solo performance, *Pain and I.* Taking disability studies as my critical framework, I think through a cripped politics of resilience, where chronic pain bodies are understood as valid, valuable and skilled.

Key words: chronic pain; crip; disability; choreography; resilience

Word count: 8129

**Introduction**

*The air calls you in,*

*The dust settles you here,*

*The breathes stroke your presence.*

*Welcome.*

*Welcome to the wakeful nights,*

*The unease of daybreak,*

*The hindered steps,*

*The troubled ones.*

*The air calls you in,*

*The air calls you in.*

*Speaking in your slowed disenchanted voice,*

*There is space for you here,*

*Space for the unhealed.*

(A performance text from *Pain and I*)

This article focuses on resilience and performance practice in the context of chronic pain. Informed by my lived experience of chronic pain and my perspective as a practitioner-researcher, I explore what kinds of creative practices and processes emerge when chronic pain and disability underpin the aesthetic, politic and methodology of performance, with particular reference to choreographic practices. I reflect on the understandings of resilience that come from living with chronic pain and, crucially, what insights into resilience arise when chronic pain experience determines how we create, dance and perform. I focus on resilience as it emerges in the context of ‘cripping’ choreography and performance practice. The article takes a critical-creative form, interwoven with performance texts, interviews, choreography descriptions, performance footage and autoethnographic material. In doing so, it considers how crip skills and knowledges about resilience can offer alternatives to neoliberal notions of ‘resilience’ as autonomy, self-reliance and triumph over adversity.

My discussions are led by, and critically reflect on, my current practice-as-research project, *Ecologies of Pain*. I have lived with chronic back pain for 18 years and, until recently, have largely understood my pain as a barrier to my life and work; an inhibitor to my performance practice and research activities. *Ecologies of Pain* focuses on the knowledge and insights that can emerge from living with chronic pain, exploring what we might learn from chronic pain experience about resilience on a ‘wounded Earth’ (Haraway, 2016). For me, living with and relating to chronic pain involves expertise in certain types of resilience, such as: working with unpredictability; learning to live with disruption and loss; and insight into human vulnerability. These expertise may be crucial skills for living in a world that is becoming increasingly unsupportive and unsustainable for human and other life forms. *Ecologies of Pain* seeks to explore and develop performance and dance practices by bodies with chronic pain, in order to disseminate creative methods for resiliently living with, acknowledging, relating and responding to the *pain* of our current ecological and climate change emergency. The research involves two stages: firstly, developing movement and performance practices by, with and for chronic pain bodies; secondly, exploring what the insights are between working creatively with chronic pain and living with / responding to wider ecological pain. This article addresses the first stage. I write in more detail about the connections between living with chronic pain and relating to wider ecological pain in an article that frames *Ecologies of Pain* more broadly and which further contextualises the second stage of the research (Hopfinger 2020, forthcoming). The second stage will involve a collaborative project with a group of differently aged adults who live with chronic pain, including professional artists and nonprofessional performers from various backgrounds, in order to explore and share diverse approaches to living with and relating to pain. I hope to explore how diverse people with chronic pain have particular skills in, and unique embodied knowledges about, resilience in a wider ecological context. This article focuses on the research strands that precede this collaborative project.

Firstly, I have undertaken collaborative research with award winning dance theatre maker Raquel Meseguer who explores the lived experience of disability through developing intimate choreographies. Through studio-based research and ongoing dialogue, we have explored how to work creatively with chronic pain through dance. I draw on documentation from our research, including transcripts from recorded conversations. Further information about our residencies can be found here <https://www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk/turning-towards>. By threading our shared and distinct thoughts throughout this article, I critically reflect on how our chronic pain bodies and experiences not only inform how we move but recreate and remake approaches to choreography. I work with a definition of ‘choreography’ from the ecological dance artist-scholar Erin Manning, who formulates choreography in terms of enabling the expression of patterns of energy and activity: for Manning, choreography is approached ‘not as the organizing principle of precomposed bodies but as a technique for bringing to expression the patterning of … activity’ (2013, 76). As such, I approach choreography as the creation of movement tasks that enable the expression, qualities and skills of chronic pain bodies: choreography as a matter less of composing bodies through specific movements and more as propositions that enable us to creatively work with, and attend to, our chronic pain bodies. Secondly, I am developing an autobiographical solo performance, *Pain and I,* which explores my relationship to, and experiences of, living with chronic pain: through experimental movement and text, the performanceframes my pain as an intimate life partner. *Pain and I* draws on my autobiography in order to shed light on the hardships, as well as the complexities and richness, of chronic pain experience. I perform *Pain and I* naked, emphasising my exploration into the fleshiness and actuality of my chronic pain body. The video documentation for this article is from a work-in-progress sharing of *Pain and I* at The Work Room, January 2020. Further information about *Pain and I* can be found here <https://www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk/pain-and-i>. This work is still in development and thus detailed discussion of its reception is beyond the scope of this article, however, I offer some insights into its reception through descriptions of specific choreographies.

In drawing directly from these strands of the performance research, I aim to focus on the knowledge that emerges from the practices themselves, as opposed to simply using the practices to illustrate theoretical ideas, or as choreographer Rosemary Lee puts it, the aim in critically reflecting on dance is to value the ‘knowledge generated by the practice itself rather than producing interpretations through analytical frameworks’ (Lee and Pethybridge 2019, 471). Furthermore, I write my body into this research through autoethnographic accounts of living with chronic pain as well as the critical reflections on the choreography practices. I follow in the direction of many disabled who, as Lara Birk describes it, ‘acknowledge the embodied nature of knowledge production by writing their own bodies into their research’ (2015, 391). My body is also written into this research in the approach I have had to take in developing this article, which has involved: writing in short stints as I am unable to sit or stand still for more than one hour at a time; regular walks in order to avoid provoking further inflammation; and, working at odd times of the day and night as my back pain is usually worse in the mornings. My thinking and articulations of ideas have been partly determined by these punctuating daily practices, including the disruptions from muscle pain, stiffness, inflammation, aches, nerve pain and so on. Birk reflects on her approach to writing, emphasising how it is ‘exceptionally difficult … to write from an internal space that is constantly and unpredictably assaulted by the chaotic circuitry of a body in trouble … [where] shots of pain here and searing aches there cannot help but to distract the writer’s train of thought and so to punctuate the text in question’ (2015, 396). This article is structured in a punctuated form, moving between transcribed dialogue between Meseguer and I, critical discussions, video footage, personal autoethnographic writings, choreography descriptions and performance texts. Perhaps this form of writing is a kind of resilient structure that is necessitated through living with chronic pain?

I also focus on how the skills and knowledges in resilience, which arise from living with chronic pain, can be used to explore and develop new choreographic approaches. I discuss creative practice beyond notions of adaptation and inclusion, focusing on what embodiments of resilience emerge when performance practice engages with and celebrates ‘the normality of (different bodies) doing things differently’ (Hansen and Philo 2007, 493). In our collaborative research, Meseguer and myself explored how to care for our bodies through choreographic practices, and how the needs and patterns of our chronic pain bodies can be affirmed and celebrated through the choreographic practices we develop. We frame this process of developing new artistic practices through chronic pain experience as a political method of cripping choreography. I discuss how my findings on resilience from my practice-as-research so far will inform the approach I take in the new collaboration of working with people with chronic pain. This critical-creative article offers a contribution to the development of a ‘cripped politics’ of resilience in choreography and performance.

**Disability and Crip**

The critical framework for these discussions is disability studies, including disability performance and dance. I propose ‘crip’ as the most relevant concept and practice for critically thinking through my research. To contextualise ‘crip’ it is necessary to briefly discuss the different models of disability. The medical and social models are predominant in current research. The medical model views disability as a ‘problem’ that rests with the individual, where certain bodies (and minds) are deemed ‘abnormal’. The medical model is arguably still the most dominant perspective in contemporary cultural thinking. From the medical model lens, resilience might emerge as a case of disabled people being able to withstand and cope with their disabilities, where being disabled is viewed as an individual ‘problem’. The social model of disability emerged in Britain in the 1990s in reaction to the medical model, initially developed by disabled scholar Michael Oliver (1990). The social model proposes that it is not an individual’s impairment that disables them, but rather societal structures: it is the physical architecture, societal attitudes and cultural norms that exclude and dis-able individuals. Resilience might emerge through this lens in terms of how much society can shift to be more inclusive of disabled people through its physical architecture and attitudes, where an individual finds their own resilience when society accommodates them. Disability scholars Hansen and Philo critique the medical and, to some degree, the social model as ‘corrective’ approaches to disability, where disabled bodies are viewed as bodies in need of normalisation: for example, crutches and prosthetics can be understood as attempts to normalise as much as possible the impaired body. This is, according to Hansen and Philo, ‘a “colonising” approach towards the impaired body’ (2007, 500). Instead, they align themselves with the affirmative model, which is a relatively new frame. It builds on the foundations of the social model but also draws on the ethos of the disability arts movement and disability pride. It is a politicised view that challenges pity and deficit narratives of disability, refusing the configurations of disability as ‘tragedy, limitation, dejection, and lossʼ (Belser 2015, 3). The affirmative model argues that an individual’s impairment is a crucial aspect of their identity and their place within disability or ‘crip’ culture. Crip is a term that is reclaimed from the derisive term ‘cripple’; a similar process of reclaiming language as with other movements such as queer activist and academic movements. For disabled scholar Alison Kafer, crip refers to a ‘cripped politics of access and engagementʼ (2013, 3), where to ‘say that something is “political” . . . means that it is implicated in relations of power and that those relations, their assumptions, and their effects are contested and contestable, open to dissent and debateʼ (2013, 9). I am concerned with contesting and re-approaching dance and performance practices through working creatively with chronic pain: I am interested in *cripping* the aesthetics and methods of performance through embracing the needs, qualities and skills of bodies with chronic pain.

Hansen and Philo theorise ‘the body’ in terms of ‘taking seriously the impaired body in its immediate materiality: in its flesh-and-boneness, in how it deals with everyday practices in everyday places, as this embodiment is “voiced” by disabled people themselves’ (2007, 493). As I will explore in discussion of my studio-based research with Meseguer further below, the politics of my critical approach relates to disabled scholar-activists who affirm ‘the powerful, positive, creative dimensions of disability, recognizing disability not simply as a lack, a limit . . . but as a lifeway that can inform and enrich human experience’ (Belser 2015, 4). Resilience from this affirmative perspective emerges not through adapting an impaired body in order to make it appear as ‘normal’ and ‘non-disabled’ as possible, but through embracing the impaired body and the expertise of that body to move in unique and creative ways.

*The touch of breezes and whirlwinds that have brought you here,*

*Sound out their bells:*

*Booming your validity,*

*Booming your vastness,*

*Booming your vulnerability.*

*Welcome the unchosen ones,*

*The ones left out,*

*The disruptive, uncomfortable, quietened, shameful ones.*

Whilst acknowledging the benefits of the social model of disability, my experience of living with chronic pain does not fit neatly into this model. I am often dis-abled by my bodily pain, as opposed to only being disabled by the social, political, physical and attitudinal structures that I operate within. Hansen and Philo propose that the binary formulation of impairment and disability that the social model relies on, means that to focus on the impaired body is seen to risk a return to the medical model, which results in an underlying ‘disembodied approach’ (2007, 494). Kafer argues that the social modelʼs well-intentioned focus on the disabling effects of society has meant that it ʻoverlooks the often-disabling effects of our bodiesʼ, and she cites how people with chronic pain are often critical of the social model because social and structural changes will do little to stop joints hurting or alleviate pain (2013, 7). With my performance research, taking an affirmative approach is not about denying the difficulties of chronic pain experience but rather it is about (re)claiming the chronic pain body as a valid and knowledgeable body, where the complexities of chronic pain experience can be respected and drawn from.

*I am trying to listen to you,*

*Get to know your textures, character and atmosphere,*

*To mark and honour you,*

*To see what you have to say*

*And let you take centre stage.*

**Turning Towards: Working Creatively with Chronic Pain**

I first came across artist Raquel Meseguer and her work on chronic pain by encountering an image of her lying down on a bench in the middle of a city. Meseguer has created a series of ongoing works, which centre on lived experiences of chronic pain. *Resting Spaces Network* develops opportunities for being horizontal in cultural venues such as cinemas(<https://uncharteredcollective.com/resting-spaces-network>); *Rest Room* is a solo performance in which Meseguer retells stories from people with invisible disabilities who attempt to rest in public spaces (<https://uncharteredcollective.com/rest-room>); and *A Crash Course in Cloudspotting* creates a public resting space and tells the same stories about attempts to rest in public, voiced by the authors in an audio journey. (<https://uncharteredcollective.com/a-crash-course-in-cloudspotting>). These works have emerged from Meseguer’s personal experiences of lying down in public spaces: she needs to rest at different times of the day and lying down is the only position that offers relief to her back pain and neuropathic pain in her legs and feet. Resting is, for Meseguer, a practice of resilience which has emerged directly from living with chronic pain: lying down is part of her everyday resilience. She is interested in developing an aesthetics of rest in her artistic practice. When I first saw the image of her lying down, I related to it instantly: I must lie in the same position because of my back pain, and I often feel self-conscious about doing this in public contexts. However, what was most compelling about this image was that I experienced it as a simultaneity of art and chronic pain: the power of this image was, for me, about the entanglement of the *practicality* of a physical need (to lie down in a public space) and the *aesthetic* of that action (or non-action – resting). Perhaps this image was beautiful to me because it tells of a body doing what it *needs* to do? This led me to consider the questions: What if the everyday practices of resilience that people with chronic pain develop, such as lying down, become the aesthetic and practical methodology of making performance? How might the making process and piece of work itself, enact and work creatively with chronic pain experience? I began to consider how chronic pain is not simply a lived experience to explore through autobiographical performance - it is not necessarily something to only make work *about -* but may in fact be a rich and much needed knowledge and expertise with which to (re)develop creative practices and aesthetics. Performance scholar Margaret Ames, in discussing the approach of working with learning disabled performers taken by dance company Cyrff Ystwyth, discusses the ‘experience of living with learning and physical disabilities as unrepresentable’ (2018, 7). I explore chronic pain less as an experience to represent in performance and more as a lived experience that may offer new ways of *doing* choreography and performance.

Performance artist Julie Laffin and performance scholar Stephen Bottoms highlight the differences between artistic work where disability is implicit in the form and performances where disability is at the forefront in terms of content (2012, 249). Whilst it may be impossible to ever fully separate form and content, Laffin and Bottoms bring attention to an approach where disabled artists work with and from their experiences in the very structures and forms of artistic creation and presentation. Laffin discusses her piece *Shield* (2007)*,* which was in her words, ‘born out of necessity’ (2012, 234). Living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity means that Laffin is often unable to physically be in the same space as others due to her sensitivity to the chemicals in people’s clothes and washing products, which resulted in a performance where Laffin performed on her roof top without a physically present audience and, simultaneously, her artistic collaborator performed hundreds of miles away in Prague to a public audience (Bottoms and Laffin 2012, 235). In this case, Laffin’s bodily needs determined both the practice of collaboration and the artistic form of the public performance. Resilience, in this context, emerges in how artistic forms and practices develop directly from Laffin’s needs, where the creative practices themselves can be understood as resilient in that they are sustaining and caring for the artist.

After encountering the image of Meseguer lying down, I contacted her and we met up in London. I remember walking along the Thames, resting on a bench together, sharing stories about when the pain had been particularly bad at certain points in each of our lives, and the difficulties of continuing to create performance work when our bodies do not function or move as they used to. We spoke about shame, regret, care, and our complex relationships with our bodies; relationships that have evolved over many years of pain. We realised that we had similar ideas about the importance of finding ways to acknowledge and respect both the difficulties of living with chronic pain and the rich - even positive - complexity of pain experience. Carrying out studio-based research at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (Glasgow) and Trinity (Bristol), our time has involved setting ourselves choreographic improvisational tasks in response to our lived experiences of chronic pain and ongoing conversations about our experiences of pain in our everyday and professional lives. Two connected methods have emerged from our work together –*practices of care* and *cripping choreography* – which I have further explored and developed through devising *Pain and I.* My argument is that these methods can be understood as crip practices of resilience by and for chronic pain bodies.

**Practices of Care as Resilience**

*Task: Create a series of movements that care for your chronic pain body.*

*Sarah Hopfinger (SH): As I started doing it . . . I really needed to go on a process with each movement . . . Keeping the sense of it being good for me could only happen by taking my time, but also . . . I could feel the difference from when it was more like “just doing the movement” and when it felt more like “following this feeling of care”. . . I’ve always associated movement with me having to bear the consequences [being in pain] . . . and so even just knowing that the point of this is to care for my back – that's the underpinning – that feels really important . . . that anything that comes from it comes from that feeling [of care].*

*Raquel Meseguer (RM): Watching it I felt like “oh this is choreography” and at times that’s where my head went, and at other times it was very touching when I remembered that you were doing it to care for your back, it felt different when I remembered that intention . . . It happened a few times that I was touched and I remembered . . . Maybe those times were the times when you were really caring for your body in the process.*

The task to ‘create a series of movements that care for your chronic pain body’ had the potential to produce a certain *quality* of moving: I felt a difference between moving as a set of dance movements and moving as a practice of care, and Meseguer reflected that she may have seen this difference. When my movements emerged from a place of care I was able to let those movements take their own time and to ‘let go’ of my expectations about what makes a choreography interesting. From my professional experiences and training in contemporary performance, I think that I have developed (and internalised) certain ableist expectations of what makes choreography interesting, such as: avoiding gestural movements that overly use the arms and hands, where arm gesture is considered too simplistic and not embodied enough; and, that embodiment is most ‘authentically’ expressed through fully ‘giving in’ to the body where we allow our bodies to - often in a physically demanding way - enact wild and vigorous movements, where movement is understood to ‘take over’ the body. Indeed, in my previous performances, I can observe these tropes (see *Wild Life* (2016), <https://www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk/wild-life>, and *Small is Beautiful* (2010), <https://www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk/small-is-beautiful>). Interestingly, in our discussions, Meseguer and I reflected that moving vigorously and chaotically – and even moving with the whole body - is particularly risky and can inflame pain, and that moving mainly with one’s arms, and working with gesture, can be a safer choreographic practice. My sense of resilience in my practice has largely, in the past, emerged through how much I can move as if I do not have chronic pain. The task to create movements that care for my chronic pain body demonstrates resilience differently, where resilience is not about withstanding or triumphing over my chronic pain body but about listening to, and moving with, the actualities of my impairments: the aesthetic quality of the movements are determined by embracing and discovering the limitations and possibilities of my body as it is. This creative task enabled me to ‘sit with’ my body and move from, and through, my chronic pain reality. This reflects Manning’s formulation of choreography as a crafting of ‘opportunities for moving-through . . . invitations for sitting-with' (2013, 91). I further explored this approach of moving with, from and through my pain when creating *Pain and I,* where I at times experimented and embraced working with arm-led movements.

**Please view ‘video clip 1’ (8 minutes, 40 seconds, contains nudity)**

Resilience emerges in this chronic pain choreography as a case of moving as an act of care for my body, as well as a process of exploring and testing out what my body can safely *do.* When creating these movements, I often worried that they were not interesting for an audience, were too slow and simple, and took far too long to develop and change. However, when performing them with my attention on the purpose of moving to care for my body, the movements became valid and valuable to me (and perhaps more interesting for an audience). Focusing on care enabled me to transgress my own (internalised able-bodied) assumptions about how a body should move and perform. In order to gain further insight into the actual choreography and the potentials of its reception, I offer my own description of the dance from Clip 1:

*My feet are planted to the ground. I begin standing still, gradually curving my back and straightening, repeating these small movements as they grow into my arms crossing my front, which merges into swinging arms that cause hands to brush my face. This brushing, through its repeating, turns into face and lip touching, which ripples into another arm swinging that is a kind of beckoning motion seeming to invite the outside of me into the inside. These are states of moving rather than singular movements. Now a faster stroking of my ears turning into hands back and forth, which creates a fuzziness between my face and those I look at, a kind of transparent barrier between me and audience members, creating a haze between us. This falls to stillness. I become a little bored. Now I raise my arms – ever so slow. There is more stillness and slowness than I expect. My boredom now feels like a reflection of the chronic-ness of pain. I bring my hands to my face, almost a gesture of despair yet there is no dwelling on one image. Hands push across my face, kneading into skin and down the front of my body, marking skin red - evidence of my physical presence. My body becomes more patient with itself. There is a calmness that emerges over time. My body is in discovery, not completion. My arms are now leading the energy up, across, around, inside the folds of space around me - a movement that touches the textures of air flows. As the opposite to effort and forcefulness, this is a pleasurable, kind, gentle moving.*

Performance scholar Arseli Dokumaci (2017) draws on James Gibson’s ecological principles of niches and affordances, where niche refers to the actions afforded by an environment to an organism. The reciprocity between organism and environment that Gibson rests his arguments on is challenged when consideration is given to people with chronic conditions and disabled individuals who do everyday activities, for example opening a door or putting on a coat, in particular ways determined by their unique bodies (Dokumaci 2017, 396). What characterises these body-environment occurrences is not reciprocity but ‘rupture’ (Dokumaci 2017, 399). In these non-normative everyday undertakings ‘the mutuality gets disrupted’ and ‘it is with this very rupturing that a *space opens up* for the organism and the environment to re-relate in combinations other than what has so far been thought possible’ (Dokumaci 2017, 399). Dokumaci presents the possibilities for impaired bodies to rupture established and normalised affordances, creating new modes of action from the meeting of an environment and the needs and tendencies of diverse bodies. She thus ‘argues for a disability politics that does not omit; on the contrary, takes it political force from the singularities of impairment’ (2017, 395). She thinks through the everyday activities of disabled people – the diverse navigations of environments by impaired bodies – as performances ‘in and through which an otherwise unimaginable affordance is imagined and made real’ (2017, 402). She references disabled scholar Ko-Le Chen, who must avoid volatile odour molecules that can at any moment afford toxicity: Chen takes and holds their breath, makes detours, recalibrates their micro-movements, and affordances emerge from these everyday negotiations ‘not as a way of bringing a “functional” task to completion, but as *a way of avoiding what brings harm’* (Dokumaci 2017, 402, italics in original). With this example, negotiating a challenging environment for someone with a chronic condition is not a question of completing ‘normal’ tasks such as walking from one place to another, but is a case of not bringing harm to - of *caring* for - an impaired body. Resilience, in this sense, can be thought of less as the ability to navigate difficult environments and more as the behaviours and movements that emerge when the focus is on care. The choreographic task to ‘create a series of movements that care for your chronic pain body’ enabled me to focus on caring for my body through *how* I moved, as opposed to me attempting to accomplish (my concept of) able-bodied movements. The choreography from *Pain and I* can be theorised as, what Liang Peilin would describe as, a ‘probody aesthetic’ (2018). Peilin, in discussing ‘ageing’ and ‘damaged’ bodies in performance, critiques how the ʻaesthetics that we generate for the stage with our bodies has largely been antibody ... [theatre] often entails the body taking care of the artwork by molding itself, in some instances even to the extent of self-sacrifice, for the theatre that it makesʼ (2018, 3). Her conceptualisation of a ‘probody aesthetics’ refers to ʻartistic performance as a means of self-care' which involves the performer finding the ‘form of their body through movement, thereby confronting and learning how best to look after its pathological conditionsʼ (2018, 5). Following Peilin’s line of thinking, dancing and performing can become practices for taking care of our 'damaged’ bodies: this approach is not about practices that merely avoid harming our bodies, it is about practices that actively *care for* them.

By embracing and caring for my chronic pain body – as opposed to moving in spite of the pain or trying to make it look as if I do not have pain - a quality of moving emerges that may speak of the resilience that my particular body has developed. As evident in the previous dialogue between Meseguer and myself, my patience with the movements increased when I focused on the task of caring for my body, and I was able to allow the movements to take as long as my chronic pain body needed.

*RM: Watching it I felt like there is something about things building . . . opening and closing . . . that it was durational . . . Whenever I think about an aesthetics of rest . . . it’s definitely durational . . . [The approach] is about really going through the care.*

This idea of duration seems to reflect different experiences of time when living with chronic pain. Saulius Geniusas describes how chronic pain is defined in terms of it not having a ‘predictable end’ and discusses how the word ‘“chronic” derives from the Greek term “*chromos,”* which refers to the passage of time’ (2015, 25-26). The chronic-ness of chronic pain experience can give rise to particular ways of experiencing time. Part of the quality of resilience in the choreography from *Pain and I* in the video clip is, I think, a matter of me following the varying durations that my body needs when doing different movements. Manning argues that working with choreographic tasks generates ‘the foregrounding of a field of resonance that defines a certain *quality* of activity’ (2013, 81, italics my own). The proposition of moving to care for my body can foreground the possibilities for a certain quality of moving; a quality that is defined in part through varying durations and taking my time. Another movement quality that emerged from this ‘practice of care’, was the bringing together of inward and outward focus.

*SH: The thing that felt enjoyable about the process was when . . . I could follow [the movements] as a way of seeing where I was or like being where I am beyond my body . . . To be able to see another human from that place of . . . caring . . . feels connecting . . . I wanted, with that inward energy, to find out how I meet the outside of me.*

*RM: Rather than meeting the outside world despite what is happening inside of you . . . despite the pain . . . [with this practice] you’re only meeting it [the outside] from deep care and attention [to your body] . . . It is difficult to have that [inside-outside attention] in everyday situations . . . When it is really painful I can collapse into that experience of pain, but if I cultivated the ability to have attention in both [the inward and outward] at once and meet the world through that care of self . . . could that apply to situations of me having to be in the world even though I am in a lot of pain?*

*SH: A process of meeting the world from the inside of caring for your body.*

Our reflections demonstrate how inwardly focusing on our bodies is a skill that can develop from living with pain. Chronic pain forces us to be unpleasantly present with our bodies: it ‘makes us *feel* our own bodies’ (Svenaeus 2015, 114, italics in original). Chronic pain can isolate ‘the subject within the field of presence, which [. . . is] disconnected from the past and the future’ (Geniuses 2015, 26). During our time together, Meseguer spoke to me about tracing the outlines and veins of the leaves of a plant beside her bed when she was deep in a pain flare up. This prompted me to recall a similar experience. I was lying by the sea in a lot of pain whilst my mother walked back to where her car was parked to come and pick me up as I could not walk any further. As I lay there, having no choice but to focus on the pain, everything dropped away apart from my body, the pain and the slither of sky and sea that I could see from my lying down position: I became intensely focused on the feel of my body on the sand. Meseguer and I reflected on how this focused attention is the only option left to us when the pain is particularly high and constant, and how we have become experts at allowing ourselves to drop into that inward focus. When performing the movements of care I found that my focus began very inwardly, attending to moving only from a place of caring for my body, and gradually I was able to open my eyes and see the room and Meseguer, which did not take away my inward focus but rather felt like my inward focus meeting with the outside. In the dialogue above, we reflected on our personal lives and how we are forced into this inward focus because of high levels of pain, and that we each find it very difficult to meet with and relate to others when in this state. What this choreographic task opened up for Meseguer and I was the idea of how we might work with this inner focus in order to also focus outwardly and meet others. Going between, or simultaneously holding, the inner and outer focus is a key quality that the caring movements task seems to enable and invite. The practice not only draws on a skill in resilience developed from chronic pain experience (the ability to inwardly focus on the body) but also creatively works with and *develops* that skill through encouraging an inward-outward focus. I further explored this practice with *Pain and I.*

**Please view ‘video clip 2’ (1 minute, 57 seconds)**

*I have my back to the audience. I turn, eyes closed. My hands and arms lead - I see with them. Twisting my torso, around to this and that side, again and again, taking my time. Now I open my eyes and look at the audience as I pass through this torso twisting moving. I look toward the direction of my arm gestures, my gaze led by the movement, sweeping my looking across the floor. I am focused inside of myself but somehow this moving opens me up outwardly - the movements grow from inside and show me what and who is outside. I let my arms tell me when to open my eyes – I see the floor, audience, air, walls. I feel this as a soft-brushing-witnessing-acknowledging quality of looking.*

Perhaps resilience in choreography is a case of turning towards our pain, caring for our bodies, allowing varying movement durations to emerge, and cultivating an inward-outward focus? Resilience is not, in this way, about withstanding and coping with chronic pain, but is about how we embrace, attend to and care for our chronic pain bodies.

*I dance with you.*

*I dance with you.*

*I dance with you.*

*I respect you.*

*I respect you.*

*I respect you.*

The intention – to care for my body – seems to open up possibilities for valuing movements in new ways, and to produce choreographies as themselves practices of resilience. The practice of care can be thought of as an example of the cripping of choreographic practice. By embracing the needs of our bodies, a choreographic approach develops which may speak of a ‘crip politics’ of dancing *with* our pain.

**Cripping Choreography as a Practice of Resilience**

*SH: I feel like I am having to rediscover [movement] with this care for my body.*

*RM: Recently I have been experimenting with – can I go to a contemporary dance class . . . and not hurt myself, and that’s a different intention than what we’re doing here . . . I’ve been going into the class and gaining something and not hurting myself . . . That is very different to going in to take care of myself . . . This [crip approach] is completely different and the success . . . is open and undefined.*

*SH: Is it connected to the difference [between] adaptation and . . . [what we are trying to do here, which] is working with [the pain] from the beginning in terms of the parameters, tasks, structures?*

Meseguer discusses her approach of attending a contemporary dance class, where she adapted the exercises to suit her body. This approach arguably places her body as ‘the different body’ in need of adapting or being adapted to. Meseguer and I have both had personal experiences of attempting to adapt ourselves to performance and dance practices, and equally of trying to adapt artistic practices to our bodies. Even during our studio- based research, we sometimes simply explored useful approaches of adapting our bodies to choreographic practices. Resilience in this scenario comes down to an ability to adapt to (able bodied) dance practices, or the possibilities for (able bodied) dance practices to be adapted to a chronic pain body. Whilst well intentioned, the invitation that I have experienced in education and professional contexts to interpret an exercise in a way that best suits my body, has largely been an uncomfortable experience. The *terms* of including my chronic pain body still sit within an able-bodied value system of doing *these* types of practices in *these* ways. This is, of course, unsurprising, since performance and dance practices have largely been devised and developed historically and presently by non-disabled bodies and minds. The attempt to be inclusive is important, but the approach of doing this including can often be experienced as, well, exclusionary, when norms for able-bodied movement go unchallenged.

*SH: What kind of new types of practice come from chronic pain experience . . . of enacting chronic pain knowledge through movement . . . as opposed to us just changing something known so that we can do it?*

Ames critiques the concept of ‘inclusion’, discussing how the Australian company Restless Dance Company describe their method as a ‘practice that goes beyond the notion of inclusion’ and instead focuses on ‘cultures of disability’ which become clear by ‘following the movement-based work of people with learning disabilities’ (2018, 6). Similarly, Meseguer and I explored ways of working creatively with the needs and tendencies of our chronic pain bodies, which led to us valuing our chronic pain bodies and embracing the qualities of movements that our bodies do. The qualities that Meseguer and I identified – care, taking time and inward-outward focus – can be understood as examples of our crip knowledges. Furthermore, these qualities are not only present within specific instances of movement practice but are also, for me, reflected in the wider approach I have been developing in my practice. Since working more openly with my chronic pain, I have found that I am able to value both working slowly and the different states within a creative process; states of inward focus and inward-outward focus. In the past I found these ideas of taking my time and allowing for inward focus difficult to value. In working with Meseguer and through devising *Pain and I*, I have felt more able to take things at the pace my body needs them to be, and to move between the states of inward and inward-outward focusing. Leffin reflects on how, since living with chronic illness, she is less ‘concerned with resolution now, with making resolved “pieces”’, and she works ‘much more slowly now than ever before’ (2012, 238).

*RM: I think about crip . . . [as] an idea, tool, a provocation . . . It feels different to . . . adapting myself to something, it feels bold, cheeky, playful, transgressive . . . If I am adapting . . . I’m still accepting that thing totally and I am asking to be different within it, whereas crip feels like it would say “well I’m not taking any of that, or I’m going to . . . take it this way because that is what is good and interesting for me” . . . [Crip has] energy and more possibilities [than adaptation or inclusion]. . . [Crip] doesn’t ask, it shakes up . . . takes space . . . I couldn’t give someone an instruction of what crip is because it is individual for all of us . . . It is widening the playing field . . . a different lens, a different paradigm, where things are assigned different value, where things I didn’t value before now have value.*

Meseguer’s reflections relate to how Dokumaci discusses disability neither in terms of ‘fitting or misfitting’ but as a case of ‘retrofit[ting] the … environment to our emergent bodily states, needs, and singularities; we do not adapt to anything but actively carve out a niche for ourselves’ (2017, 404). The concepts of adaptation and inclusion are markedly different to the concept and practice of *cripping.* With adaption, it is always already a specific idea or ideal, and usually an ideal from an able-bodied perspective, that is being adapted to. With inclusion, it is likely to be an able-bodied context that ‘we’ are being included into. With cripping, the approach is politically underpinned by celebrating and embracing our disabled bodies (and minds). For Meseguer and I, cripping is a matter of creating new artistic methods that do not simply accommodate our chronic pain bodies but actively care for, value and celebrate them. With a crip approach, resilience is neither about adapting to normative structures nor normative structures expanding to include us: resilience emerges through the playful and bold ways of moving that our chronic pain bodies have skills in.

*The air calls you in.*

*We scream*

*Come back to me.*

*There is space for you here.*

*This kiss of brokenness,*

*This kiss of damage,*

*It wets, softens, opens.*

**Conclusion**

In this article, I have critically-creatively explored crip practices of resilience as they emerge through lived experiences of chronic pain and choreography by chronic pain bodies. The discussions have involved a conceptual and practical move beyond the social model of disability: with a crip approach the creation of new practices is emphasised as opposed to only calling for the removal of social and physical barriers. Dokumaci proposes that the social model is one way of making the world more accessible, but argues that we must move ‘beyond (a limited) “freedom from” a discriminatory world to (a broadened) “freedom to” bring action possibilities into life; possibilities that are otherwise unimaginable’ (2017, 409). With this crip politics, ‘the particularity of the ways in which we are disabled, our corporeal singularities, and the specificities of the diseases, pains, and discomforts that we *live with* do all *matter’* (Dokumaci 2017, 409). Turning towards chronic pain, and cripping choreography, is one way of embodying new ways of valuing and doing movement, which would otherwise remain unimaginable.

I have explored what movement qualities emerge when the chronic pain body is embraced and valued – qualities of care, movement duration and inward-outward focus. I have shown how these qualities are skills that come directly from the everyday resilience of living with chronic pain, where choreography not only draws from, but also develops, these resilience skills. The crip knowledges that I have focused on point to a concept of resilience that is not about neoliberal notions of adaptation, stability and self-mastery. Instead, resilience is practiced through creatively working with, and embracing the skills and tendencies of, impaired bodies. Furthermore, through boldly celebrating our bodies, perhaps a crip approach to choreography can contribute to enriching our lived experiences of impairment?

In looking forward to the next of stage of my research, which involves collaborating with multiple people with chronic pain, it seems key to remain open to what the collective and individual skills in resilience will be. Peilin describes an ‘expanded view of beauty in art that insists that art is beautiful when it takes care of the health and wellbeing of its maker, and when care for the body is a means and an end of creative expressionʼ (2018, 4). What care, or a ‘probody aesthetics’, looks like is ‘unique to each performer’ (Peilin 2018, 6). I am concerned with how the structures and methods of collaboration that I co-develop can enable diverse performers to practice care for their bodies, where exploring and discovering what caring for one’s body means will form the basis of the creative process. I hope to develop a collaborative approach, where diverse crip skills in resilience can be enacted, developed and celebrated through the creative process and live public performance.

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