

Project Narrative Draft

Project Overview and Significance

Six artists with disabilities are currently fellows with the CripTech Incubator, an art-and-technology fellowship centered on disability innovation. In 2022-23, this cohort of artists will create and showcase interdisciplinary work in art and technology through the CripTech Incubator residencies, engaging and remaking creative technologies through the lens of access. Within disability culture, the term “crip” recognizes disability as a valued cultural and political identity. But “crip” also identifies an active practice whereby disabled makers and artists transform built environments or technologies to be more accessible. This program has impact in the worlds of art (the artists were selected through a juried process and have national profiles and reputations), of technology (the outcomes of the residencies are expected to include technological innovation), and of disability culture (it provides all-too-rare financial and technological support as well as visibility to a marginalized community).

In addition to these impacts, our project, *Reco(r)ding CripTech*, envisions yet another significant potential contribution of the CripTech Incubator: to a timely, humanities-based inquiry into knowledge production.

Who produces knowledge? How is that knowledge expressed or represented? Who has access to knowledge? We understand the CripTech Incubator as a distinctive research ecology—one in which knowledge is produced by the often marginalized and under-represented disability community, through arts-based, collaborative, and interdisciplinary means. That knowledge is expressed through novel creations at the intersection of the arts and technology.

The public exhibitions, talks, and curricular modules planned for the products of the CripTech Incubator will showcase these creations, but will be less impactful in terms of revealing the CripTech Incubator as a site for inquiry. To do that, **Reco(r)ding CripTech will collaborate closely with the CripTech Incubator artists to document their creative, interdisciplinary processes. We will share this documentation in an archive on *a2ru Ground Works* (groundworks.io), an open-access online**

platform for arts-integrated research. The archive may include video- or audio-taped interviews and conversations; written, video- or audio-taped journals; images; notes; creative iterations; and more. The archive will meet the highest standards of accessibility.

By framing the artists' processes as arts-integrative research, this documentation will foreground disabled artists as producers of knowledge, and interdisciplinary works of art as expressions of knowledge. This intervention has implications for both the research enterprise and the disability community by upending the assumption of the scholarly article as the definitive site of knowledge production.

In the US, the concept of *arts research*, with its sensorial, aesthetic, non-numerical and often non-verbal ways of knowing, is not widely embraced. If the concept of artist-as-knower is uncommon, the disabled artist-as-knower is even more so. "Experts" or "professionals," rather than disabled people themselves, are often viewed as authorities on disability; similarly, a disproportionate amount of scholarship into the artistic production of the disability community is written by nondisabled scholars who frame their outsider identities as "objective." Instead, Reco(r)ding CripTech is led by disabled scholars and rooted in liberatory, social justice-oriented disability studies. The project centers disabled artists as knowers, witnessing and sharing their creative processes as means to understand this knowledge better.

By presenting the CripTech Incubator as an unconventional research ecology (arts-based practices and methodologies in collaboration with technological ones), pursued by underrepresented researchers (disabled artists), Reco(r)ding CripTech challenges assumptions about knowledge production and inquiry. Furthermore, the project models alternative sites for analysis (creative process, rather than outcome) and alternative means for presenting knowledge (open-access, WCAG-compliant online platform).

Field Building

This project represents a major step in building the field of arts-integrative research, the term we use for research at the intersection of the arts and other disciplines. *Ground Works* is a2ru's online platform for arts-integrative research. It showcases arts-integrative inquiry and knowledge production, functioning as a

scholarly publication to validate this research through peer review and publication. *Ground Works* has aspirations to showcase the *processes* that underlie these research *products*. Revealing creative, interdisciplinary processes and making them available for critical review allows the emerging arts-integrated research community of practice the opportunity to share, analyze, and iterate on these processes—important in a field that does not have established methodologies. For those engaged in arts research and arts-integrated research, the large-scale examination of arts-integrated processes that will be available in the Reco(r)ding CripTech is a trove of information on *how* this work can be done. Furthermore, members of this community of practice can point to the archive in case-making about their unconventional research; Reco(r)ding CripTech on *Ground Works* represents and validates arts-integrated research so that the research enterprise, especially at universities, can begin to recognize it.

Advancing disability studies through the application of principles of disability justice, Reco(r)ding CripTech is an antidote to non-disabled scholarship of art created by disabled people that tends towards stories of “overcoming disability.” Disabled activist-artist Neil Marcus said, “Disability isn’t a brave struggle or ‘courage in the face of adversity.’ Disability is an art. It’s an ingenious way to live.” The innovative ways disabled artists move, create, and perceive the world partially define their artistic contributions. The artworks exist not in spite of their disabilities, but because of them. Reco(r)ding CripTech reveals this unique ingenuity, this confluence of life-as-art and professional art-making, by documenting the artists’ radically ingenious processes. It is significant for the disabled community to have its artist members represented, visible, and valued as innovative knowledge producers in a respected, peer-reviewed publication like *Ground Works*, positioned to be recognized by the research enterprise.

Work-plan

Phase 1: Documentation. Documentation is grounded in an ongoing listening process with the CripTech Incubator artists—surfacing issues and tensions, and co-creating an adaptive and inclusive documentary effort. The conversations are guided by cross-disability facilitation and meet the individual artists’ access

needs. The artists have full control and agency over how their work is documented, and who can access that documentation. The Reco(r)ding CripTech team serves to support and provide options to the artists.

Documentation will include *capture of artifacts of the creative process*: rough drafts, notes, and iterations. It will also include *reflection on the creative process*. Reflection *modes* might be solo autoethnographies, dialogic engagements between pairs of artists, and/or ‘roundtables’ (Hamraie 2019, McRuer and Johnson 2014) where the artists are in conversation (asynchronous and synchronous) with each other and/or with Reco(r)ding CripTech team members. Elizabeth McLain, the team’s cross-disability facilitator, will design and implement these modes in collaboration with the artists. Reflections will be conducted through *mediums* that each artist chooses, and might include journaling, dialogues between artists, interviews, participation in online forums such as Discord, and art-making. These reflections may be *captured* via photographs, audio recordings, video recordings, screen shots, and text documents. Daragh Byrne, the team’s technical designer, will oversee the digital capture of artist reflections and ensure their accessibility for other artists and for the online archive.

Phase 2: Begin creation of online archive. We will assemble the artists’ iterative and reflective artifacts in a radically accessible interactive multimedia archive on *Ground Works*. This will draw inspiration and technical resources from prior work by Byrne to document and curate interdisciplinary design futures practice (Byrne and Kelliher 2015, Kelliher and Byrne 2015) . Each artifact may be stored in multiple formats on this web platform. Each artifact can be associated with others, according to metadata such as thematic concepts. This will allow for a series of richly interwoven multimedia accounts that can be traced over time, over topics and themes, and across and between artists. Again, agency and access are priorities; artists may include or remove any media they choose. Working with a digital access consultant, we will ensure full accessibility of all materials on the archive, implementing access measures such as captioning and description, and working with the artists to provide “aesthetic access” — going beyond basic access to underscore or add dimension to the art—when possible. The archive will be available on the *Ground Works* platform so that other artists and scholars can access, engage with, and respond to it.

Potential Barriers

The current work-plan and budget only account for remote/virtual interactions, which may be inadequate for documenting some artists' processes. This would result in reduced scope or quality of documentation.

While the artists have expressed initial enthusiasm about documentation, they may find it demands too much time or is not of interest to them. This would result in partial or reduced participation from artists.

The project may require additional videography and post-production audio work, beyond what we estimated and budgeted for. This would result in the need for additional fundraising or reduced documentation.

The realities of COVID dictate that artists may become ill and need breaks to care for themselves. This would result in a greater time commitment from artists and facilitators.

Programmatic ambitions

Reco(r)ding CripTech represents an important developmental step for both the CripTech Incubator and *Ground Works*. The project provides important data for the CripTech Incubator about the workings of the artist residencies, informing any future efforts. For *Ground Works*, Reco(r)ding CripTech not only serves to advance its commitment to equity and inclusion, but also provides a proof-of-concept for its longstanding ambition to feature arts-integrative research processes as well as products. We hope this format can be scaled to future iterations of the CripTech Incubator, and adapted to document the knowledge embedded in other similarly complex and non-traditional arts-integrated efforts.

Social Justice Issues

This project corrects the typical approach to disability in the arts, often led by nondisabled scholars. This often entails narratives in which disabled people are held up as exemplars of the community because, through hard work, they succeeded despite their disabilities. These narratives place the burden on the

disabled individual, requiring them to work harder, rather than on people who have the power to change the inaccessible environment, and they deny agency to the disabled artists.

In contrast, Reco(r)ding CripTech draws on the principles of disability justice in our project's focus, methods, and outcomes. Recognizing disability as an integral component of an intersectional identity, disability justice also values disabled people apart from capitalist notions like "productivity," and as a vibrant force capable of progressing towards liberation. Piloting scholarly models that decenter the voice of the privileged academic in favor of centering marginalized artists enacts disability justice in the research methodology itself. By preserving not just the final product but also the artistic process itself, Reco(r)ding CripTech provides alternative models of creation for emerging disabled artists. Additionally, Reco(r)ding CripTech provides a crucial collection of primary source materials for college and university courses on disabled art-making.

Disability justice also demands leadership of those most impacted—here, the disabled artists themselves. Leadership *by* members of the disability community in scholarship *about* that community is essential. The Reco(r)ding CripTech Principal Investigator is a disabled scholar and activist in/on disability culture, and disabled artists, scholars, and activists comprise its Advisory Board. Just as importantly, we are scaffolding our scholarly documentation to model and to support, enabling the artists to lead.

Finally, Reco(r)ding CripTech prioritizes access—both financial access and web content access. Financial access is important as a disproportionate number of disabled people live in poverty. They are closed out of scholarship about their own culture because it's only available through academic libraries and expensive subscription costs, but the *Ground Works* platform is open access and free to the public. It is also fully accessible (WCAG-compliant) for people of all abilities.

Digital Scholarship

Mechanisms for digital co-creation, data collection, and dialogue are central to this work. Digital platforms like Zoom and other forms of networked collaboration will be the primary medium for the

CripTech residency artists to connect, converse, and collaborate, over distances and in real-time, during the documentation phase of this project. Digital platforms also offer a range of real-time accessibility features including live-captioning and support for screen readers, and a range of data capture and documentation strategies. Given the varied needs for access and comfort, digital methods can enable much richer, more inclusive documentation and dialogue to take place with the artists.

Producing an open, accessible, and freely available digital archive is at the heart of Reco(r)ding CripTech. Digital methods enable broad access to the archive by virtue of *Ground Works* platform's presence on the web. Access is broadened further by the affordances of audio descriptions, captioning, and support for screen readers and other assistive devices. As a resource for education, advocacy, and further research, the archive will be maintained online through the *Ground Works* platform after the project is completed. Each object in the archive will be given a DOI, a citation, and licensing information. a2ru is committed to ensuring it is available and accessible online indefinitely.

Institutional Infrastructure

The Alliance for Arts in Research Universities (a2ru) at the University of Michigan is home to the proposed project, and it coordinates efforts across collaborators at Virginia Tech (McLain) and Carnegie Mellon (Byrne). We will build on a2ru's history of leadership in and support for arts-integrative research and collaborative networks, and leverage the existing resources and infrastructure at our respective institutions. This includes, for example, a2ru staff to help with project communications and dissemination and outreach activities, and campus networks and information communication technologies (e.g., Zoom accounts with live transcription support). Byrne and McLain have access to various forms of media, technology, software, and tools that can cater to the differing needs of each of the artists involved, as well as software for recording and editing interviews and conversations with artists. The University of Michigan has technical support and discounted hosting with Amazon AWS to support web platform delivery and content hosting, and the Libraries at Michigan offer expertise in accessible content and provide accessibility audits to ensure compliance with WCAG standards.