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TECHNOLOGICAL PRACTICES OF REFUSAL: RADICAL REIMAGINATION IN M EIFLER'S COMPUTATIONAL PROSTHETICS

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The project will explore the connections between disability and practices of refusal as they relate to technology, building upon both Black feminist theory, critical disability studies, and feminist science and technology studies (STS) (Barabas, 2022; Benjamin, 2016; Garcia et al., 2020; Hoffmann, 2021). An overarching objective of this work is to connect Black feminist theory and critical disability studies to feminist STS to challenge normative understandings of ableism in ways that consider race not as an addendum to such movements, but a central organizing principle. Additionally, this work extends Schalk & Kim's (2020) feminist-of-color disability studies. Schalk & Kim write that a feminist-of-color disability studies maps the connections between multiple forms of violence, which underscore "unexpected points of affinity that might build coalition across categories" (p. 38). This essay explores artist M Eifler's computational prosthetics (Eifler, 2022; Vargas, 2022) as technological practices of refusal.

There is a growing body of literature that situates refusal as a framework to interrogate how sociotechnical systems both reproduce and are embedded in systems of domination that impede collective liberation. Barabas (2022) extends feminist understandings of refusal as a means to interrogate how sociotechnical systems, which are built upon systems of domination, reproduce inequities and further structural harms. According to Barabas (2022), refusal is "a practice of generative boundary-setting" (p. 36). It is also a means to engage in a practice of radical reimagination, in Barabas' words, "a framework for renegotiating the terms of engagement...refusal offers an entry point into a transformative process of becoming otherwise, to break free from overdetermined notions of the probable or practical in order to enact the possible" (p. 50). Refusal is more than an outright denial or simply challenging harmful systems; it is about imagining beyond pervasive logics to build a better future. Extending the literature concerning feminist refusal and technology, technological practices of refusal additionally look toward Black feminist theory and critical disability studies to examine

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how technological practices are means to challenge normative logics and engage in collective world-making practices toward liberation and societal transformation.

The concept of technological practices of refusal builds upon Campt's practices of refusal. According to Campt (2017), refusal entails the "quotidian reclamations of interiority, dignity, and refusal marshaled by black subjects in their persistent striving for futurity" (Campt, 2017, p. 11). These practices are everyday radical reclamations of subjectivity that refuse dehumanization.

Refusal is tied to the grammar of Black feminist futurity: "that which will have *had to* happen" (p. 17). Campt notes that "the grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must...It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be" (p. 17). Refusal is the radical imagining of a future that denies the continuation of the systems that preclude these possibilities.

Refusal can thus be understood as both a pathway toward imagining previously foreclosed futures, and a movement-building framework wherein disability activists can illustrate the connections between ableism, white supremacy and capitalism. This is not a conflation of anti-Black racism and ableism, but rather, the point is to explore the connections between ableism and white supremacy as they are produced by intersecting systems of domination that devalue individuals based on white supremacist ideals of race, class, gender and ability.

M Eifler is an artist whose work explores the connections between hierarchies of value, knowledge production, and disability (Vargas, 2022). The artist's computational prosthetics combine AR with physical experiences to interrogate dominant understandings of normalcy, ability, and disability. An example of Eifler's computational prosthetic work is *Masking Machine*. The title of the work refers to the act of masking, wherein autistic individuals suppress certain non-normative behaviors or mimic the behaviors of those around them. The *Masking Machine* project utilizes wearable augmented reality technology to create and project various masks. Selfies of the artist are repeatedly fed into an algorithm, while being changed slightly each time. This repetitive refeeding process created distorted depictions of Eifler's face, which are ultimately converted into AR masks. Eifler notes that this repetition uncovered the role of technology in the process, which is often rendered invisible. Inspired by the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's "Mouthpiece," Eifler devised a wearable technology with a camera that records live video while they wear a screen in front of their face that instantaneously projects a mask of their distorted face. The screen blocks Eifler from seeing those with whom they interact, while it simultaneously simulates eye contact with its viewer.

Despite what their naming might allude to, Eifler's computational prosthetics are not concerned with "curing" disability. Rather, the project is concerned with assumptions regarding normative social interaction and behavior, relations around technology, and the connections between embodiment and knowledge production. In their own words, Eifler explains that their art practices explore how disability spurs various "ways of knowing" (ibid). Eifler's computational prosthetics do not signify a techno-solutionist

understanding of disability and technology, rather they gesture toward transformative practices that counter the hierarchal structuring of needs and exclusionary norms that govern social relations.

Eifler's project highlights how disabled people create and build relations through technology. These practices are more than simply technological interventions. Eifler's work can be understood as practices of refusal that look beyond the exclusionary norms that govern social relations and knowledge production. They are technological practices that reveal possibilities to imagine and enact new ways of being. It is a radical restructuring that Campt describes as a "grammar of possibility" (Campt, 2017, p. 17). Technological practices of refusal therefore entail a refusal of the conditions that render not only disabled people's humanity—but people proscribed by assumed pathologies—as incomprehensible.

Technological practices of refusal explore how disabled people reimagine new means of social relation despite the routine foreclosure of futurity. Refusal challenges systems of power that undergird racist and ableist pathologies, which determine how people are not only valued—but granted humanity—due to the ongoing legacies of colonialism and racial capitalism. Refusal, and the grammar of Black feminist futurity name the urgency of rejecting such logics. Technological practices of refusal underscore the role of alternative practices that work toward societal transformation. Refusal entails imaginative world-making practices that envision a future—a "crip vision of an elsewhere" (Kafer, 2013, p. 24)—against the systemic preclusion of such imaginaries.

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