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What are you reading?

Nishida, A. (2022). *Just Care: Messy Entanglements of Disability, Dependence, and Desire*. **Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.**
Review by Kaat Kenis
PhD candidate at Antwerp University
kaat.kenis@uantwerpen.be

Nishida, A. (2022). *Just Care: Messy Entanglements of Disability, Dependence, and Desire*. **Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.**

In *Just Care: Messy Entanglements of Disability, Dependency, and Desire*, Akemi Nishida offers a critical and deeply personal examination of care as a political, economic, and relational practice. She challenges the dominant narratives that idealise independence and frame dependency as a personal failure. By centering the lived experiences of those engaged in daily care work, she reveals how neoliberal policies commodify care and reinforce racialized, gendered, and ableist structures of oppression. Nishida unpacks the entangled relationships between care workers and care recipients, showing how the very systems designed to support them often result in mutual debilitation. At the same time, she argues that care is not just a site of exploitation – it can also be a powerful space for resistance.

In the first two chapters of her book, Nishida examines the neoliberalisation of U.S. public healthcare programs and how it has led to the commodification of marginalized people, positioning them both as care recipients and care workers. Within this capitalist model of care, care recipients, treated as clients or consumers, are expected to 'use their consumer power to purchase care labour' (Nishida, 2022, p. 81), often with limited control over the conditions of that care. Meanwhile, care workers – many of whom are from racialised, lower-class and migrant backgrounds – are taught to put their own lives and well-being aside to prioritize that of others while engaging in low-paid, undervalued jobs (Nishida, 2022, p. 81). Engaging with this ongoing tension between perspectives on care in both disability studies and feminist theory, Nishida paints a picture of a care system that reinforces strict, hierarchical power dynamics. She introduces the concept of *necropolitical care* (Nishida, 2022, p. 98) to describe how both care providers and recipients are placed in precarious positions under today's consumer model of care. In this system, their well-being is positioned secondary to the demands of the market-driven healthcare industry, creating a deeply entangled structure of care injustice (Nishida, 2022, p. 78). Yet, Nishida underscores that care workers and recipients are not simply passive victims of neoliberal care structures but active agents of resistance and change. She writes: '[Care workers and receivers] demand that their lives and care practices be understood as more than passive victimisation by the neoliberal care formations, and they also assert themselves as the agents of its destruction' (Nishida, 2022, p. 104). *Just Care* is thus more than a critique of neoliberal care systems, it is a call to reimagine care as a radical and relational practice.

In chapter three, Nishida introduces the concept of *affective collectivity* to describe the deep, embodied connections that can form between care partners, directly challenging the insistence in care industries on professional detachment and rigid boundaries (Nishida, 2022, p. 104). Mainstream narratives often define adequate care by its ability to restore or maintain a person's independence, while dependence is framed as a weakness to 'categorise and hierarchise people along the human and dehumanisation spectrum' (Nishida, 2022, p. 131), reinforcing ableism inflicted on disabled communities. In response, social justice movements have championed interdependency as an alternative, rejecting the individualistic logic of neoliberalism in favour of a more collective and relational understanding of care (Nishida, 2022, p. 134). Considering this ongoing tension, Nishida's work with disabled and queer care collectives presents an alternative intervention in the conceptualisation of messy dependency – a muddled, non-reciprocal form of interdependence that resists the notion of the equal exchanges of care that are often assumed in an interdependence frame. Instead of striving for a rigid, clean and symmetrical balance, messy dependency acknowledges the fluid, unpredictable, and deeply relational nature of care (Nishida, 2022, p. 151).

At first glance, a book on care might seem an unexpected choice for a researcher like me, situated in design sciences. However, since Inclusive and Universal Design, the two most commonly used 'design philosophies' in design for accessibility, have gradually lost their critical edge (Imrie, 2012; Kille-Speckter & Nickpour, 2022). I feel the need to orient myself to more critical fields. Despite their origins in disability activism, these design

philosophies fail to question dominant norms, instead reinforcing existing power structures at play. Drawing from critical disability studies, feminist theory – but also heavily inspired by care studies – my research investigates how interlocking systems of cisheteropatriarchy, racism, ableism, among other intersecting systems of oppression, shape the design process and materialise its outcomes.

As Nishida frames care as 'the foundation and necessity for inclusivity, accessibility, and from-the-ground-up social transformation' (Nishida, 2022, p. 7), her work supports me to rethink the practice of design as an act of care – one in which products, spaces, and technologies function as actors within a broader web of care. Nishida presents care as both a site of control and a tool for resistance. Care, as she argues, is inherently relational, weaving together human and nonhuman actors in a temporally and spatially fluid practice (Nishida, 2022, p.11). Such a broad, yet critical perspective leaves space for design to be conceptualised as an activity of care, reimagining it as a messy, yet relational practice that disrupts the conventional caregiver/designer and care receiver/user binary.

Much like Nishida's critique of the care assemblage – where disability and inability to work are transformed into market opportunities that supply 'capacitative and normalizing' solutions (Nishida, 2022, p. 47) – Inclusive and Universal Design often produce products, services and environments that perpetuate neoliberal ideals of autonomy and productivity. They often claim to 'help' people with disabilities gain independence, yet what they actually do is help them assimilate into an unquestioned notion of normalcy, usually through the purchase of a product, without critically examining what such normalcy means or who it truly serves. Nishida's introduction of *affective collectivity* and *messy dependency* as resistance to these neoliberal values presents new possibilities to reimagine Universal or Inclusive Design process as a messy, relational and participatory practice. Nishida argues that this shift (in care) has the potential to disrupt the deep-rooted individualism embedded and enforced in neoliberal politics, a disruption I believe could similarly reshape design sciences.

In the final chapter, Nishida introduces *bed activism*, i.e. a form of resistance and visioning that emerges from disabled and crip bed space, positioning *crip wisdom* as a valuable counterpoint to dominant frameworks that position disabled communities as passive beneficiaries (Nishida, 2022, p. 154, p. 175). Within design practice, *crip wisdom* offers a radical rethinking of how the design process is structured. Rather than simply making existing systems more inclusive, *crip wisdom* helps us rethink the system as a whole, centering the everyday tinkering and designing disabled people do to make the environment fit their access needs. Not only does this approach disrupt the idea of the designer-as-expert, but it also dismantles the hierarchical binary between the recurrent dominant practice of nondisabled designer and the disabled user/nondesigner.

Just Care is a necessary and timely work that speaks to the ongoing tension on care in disability studies and feminist theory. Nishida not only critiques the structural inequalities embedded in contemporary care systems, but also envisions alternative, community-based models that prioritise collective liberation within the inherently messy practice of care. By expanding our understanding of care, Nishida's work creates opportunities for critical engagements across disciplines, including design. It encourages us to see how acts of resistance, resilience, and other-world-making emerge even within oppressive structures. Or as Nishida states: 'Where there is a disabled life, there is always crip wisdom' (Nishida, 2022, p. 30).

Kaat Kenis

Kaat Kenis (she/her) is a PhD researcher at the faculty of Design Sciences of the University of Antwerp. She obtained an MA in Gender & Diversity studies from Ghent University and an MSc in Product Development from the University of Antwerp. Her current project: Beyond the Binary: an intersectional approach towards a more systemic Inclusive Design is funded by Research Foundation Flanders (FWO, 1135325N) and investigates the potential of a more critical and intersectional conception of inclusion and accessibility within design practices.

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