

Molly Joyce: Virtuosity from Disability



Disability in dance and music is a growing artistic field. In Switzerland companies such as Theater HORA are internationally recognized, however the discourse on disability at Swiss Art Schools is still in its early stages. In particular, the perspective of artists who identify as disabled is not yet part of the dialogue, as well as the Anglophone/U.S.-perspective in disability studies with Swiss developments.

To investigate these discourses, I will research virtuosity from disability. As a disabled composer and performer, I have found limited definitions of virtuosity based on specific skill rather than a spectrum of physicality. In a cross-disciplinary trajectory and mixed-method design involving qualitative methods of elite interviews, case study analysis, and artistic and academic outcomes, I will develop a composition/performance work series and written dissertation cultivating virtuosity learned from disabled dancers, expanding upon my collaborations with dance and applying intersemiotic integration to serve these processes. Dance is the most developed discipline in disability arts, with activity worldwide and stemming back to the 1980s, and intersemiotic integration aims to serve both the originating culture (dance) and receiving culture (music) for a mutually beneficial methodology. This will be developed at Zurich and Graz Universities of the Arts, which prioritize artistic-scientific approaches that combine theory and practice, fostering the academic and artistic overlay in investigating my direct experience with disability and how it can serve virtuosity. Disability is the largest yet on perhaps most under-recognized minority worldwide (15% according to WHO/World Bank 2011 Report on Disability), and the research results intend to expand rigid understandings of virtuosity, disability and unveil implicit interdependencies of virtuosity and disability, utilizing theory from Tobin Siebers (Disability Aesthetics), David VanderHamm (The Social Construction of Virtuosity), and more to highlight disability as a vital, creative force across artistic disciplines and society at large.

<https://www.mollyjoyce.com/disability>