

PhD Abstract

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Performing Chronic Conditions – Crip Comedy as a Means of Coping with a Hidden Disabilities

Comic performative practices of and by chronically ill and dis/abled bodies have for the most part been excluded from the history of the performing arts. However, my research project investigates performative practices that conceive of the chronically ill body as a comic body. With that premise in mind, I investigate crip comedy on, with and through the chronically ill and dis/abled body in contexts such as Live Art and Devised Theatre.

My research on crip comedy is driven by the questions: How can crip comedy help to make visible the largely invisible ableist discourses of the performing arts, with their hegemonic dramaturgies and virtuoso performing styles, as well as those of implicit, normative body politics? How can non-visible chronic conditions – as temporal phenomena and as a way of knowing and world-making – inform, interrupt, reinvent and re-shape our understanding of normative time, bodies and comedy?

In analysing crip comic timing, mechanisms, identities, and norms, I employ methodologies, concepts and vocabulary that can help to position crip comedy in the field of the performing arts, artistic research and cultural studies. I aim to highlight peripheral, disruptive and unpleasant qualities of comedy, such as grotesque, scatological, vulgar, cringe-worthy and insider and/or community humor. Therefore, I will set up performative explorations like using a ventriloquist puppet to embody a hidden disability, by keeping a stool diary and by convening a Clinic Clown Congress.

My research will interlink epistemologies from various disciplines to highlight the as yet still invisible intersections between dis/ability and often non-visible identity categories such as class and queerness. First I will map the field of practitioners depicting and enacting experiences of chronic illness and/or dis/ability in a comedic manner. Next, I will explore and analyze how comedic and therapeutic practices productively inform one other through existing healing and coping techniques like therapy puppetry and clown doctoring. I will thereby try to shift the boundaries between disability arts and medicine, performing arts and cultural studies, between illness and health, and between high art and everyday culture.

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