

# LETTING THE 'FREAK FLAG FLY'<sup>1</sup> Queering and Crippling Within Artistic Exhibition Practices

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1. The title refers to a quote by Simi Linton: 'We are (...) letting our "freak flag fly" (...) We are all bound together, not by this list of our collective symptoms but by the social and political circumstances that have forged us as a group'. Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 4.

2. Alison Kafer, 'After Crip, Crip Afters', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, 2 (2021), 416.

'(Queer-)crip perspectives can help to keep our attention on disruptive, inappropriate, composing bodies—bodies that invoke the future horizon beyond straight composition.'

**Robert McRuer**

Queer and crip. For a long time, these two terms have only carried a negative meaning and were solely used as swear words and external ascriptions. Both cast somebody as abnormal and abject, as defective, deviant, and sick. Both terms make it clear that queers and crips share a history and a present of social, political, and economic injustice, exclusion, and oppression. All those referred to by these words have been and still are repeatedly exposed to pathologization, discrimination, stereotyping, demonization, and isolation by power structures and institutions related to medicine, religion, the education system, and the labour market. At the same time, queer and crip have experienced a self-confident and self-empowering appropriation and reclaiming by their communities. Functioning as an umbrella term, crip describes mobility impairments, physical disabilities, chronic illnesses, and mental or sensory impairments. Similar to queer, it is flexible and fluid and still in the process of defining its own meaning.<sup>2</sup> Crip aligns with the fluid and ever-changing

horizons of the term queer. Just like queer, crip can also be used as a noun, an adjective, and a verb. As a verb—cripping or to crip—crip describes ‘a process of critique, disruption, and re-imagining, and includes an orientation and a way of living’.<sup>3</sup> It undoes ableism and ‘spins mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects’,<sup>4</sup> using, for example, strategies like camp, humour, wit, sarcasm, and satire. Under the moniker queer theory and crip theory, both terms are also represented as theoretical concepts within academia. Alison Kafer describes crip theory as a ‘political/relational model of disability, one that builds on social and minority model frameworks but reads them through feminist and queer critiques of identity’.<sup>5</sup> Crip theory analyzes culture from a perspective that centres crip or disabled movements, experiences, and embodiment, placing more emphasis on social critique or critical theory, analyzing injustice, and understanding disability as a political category rather than as an individual pathology or personal tragedy.<sup>6</sup> In addition, crip theory, like queer theory, is dedicated to questioning and dissolving concepts of normalcy, the supposed normative normal, and the compulsion to follow and conform to norms in general.<sup>7</sup> Both theoretical strands illustrate the inadequacy of the binary system of disabled and non-disabled, healthy and sick, normal and not normal. They question, theorize, and deconstruct the supposedly natural and normal and, therefore, the often invisible, unnamed, and naturalized concepts of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness and focus on their intersectionalities.

## Queerating and Cripdom

Queerness and cripdom imagine bodies and desires in other ways and operate as cultural correctives combining collective cultures and communities. Recent years have shown that crip theory seems to be moving from academia and activism into the arts and is perceived by art institutions, too.<sup>8</sup> Especially in the recent pandemic years, the number of exhibitions dedicated to the topic of crip, illness, and accessibility has increased. Exhibitions and exhibition spaces seem to be crippled by curatorial activism<sup>9</sup>—also methodically—by making them more accessible and low-threshold.<sup>10</sup> Art shows

3. Emily Hutcheon and Gregor Wolbring, ‘“Crippling” Resilience: Contributions from Disability Studies to Resilience Theory’, *M/C Journal* 16, 5 (2013), [www.doi.org/10.5204/mcj.697](http://www.doi.org/10.5204/mcj.697).

4. Carrie Sandahl, ‘Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance’, *GLQ: A Journal on Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9, 1–2 (2003), 37.

5. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 4.

6. *Ibid.*, 14.

7. Sandahl, ‘Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance’, 26.

8. Some curators who have long been engaged in dismantling ableist hegemonies across intersectional axes of difference, including gender, race, and sexuality, include Amanda Cachia in the USA, Iarlaith Ní Fheorais in Ireland, and Sean Lee, who is the director of programming at the art space Tangled Art + Disability, based in Toronto, Canada. I would also like to refer to the work of the Sickness Affinity Group, a group of artists, cultural workers, and activists mostly based in Berlin whose work pivots around the theme of sickness, disability, and care work, challenging the competitive and ableist mode of working in the arts.

9. In her book *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (London: Thames Hudson, 2018), Maura Reilly defines curating as a potentially activist practice. In doing so, she refers to curatorial strategies that give voice to those who have historically been silenced or ignored, as well as to

exhibitions that address current political and social issues as curatorial correctives.

**10.** In Germany, for example, there has been an increase in exhibition texts and websites written in so-called simple language. Simple language is intended to make texts easier to understand and thus also serves accessibility. Every exhibition opening at the Schwules Museum (Gay Museum) in Berlin, for example, is interpreted by a sign language interpreter and each exhibition is also summarized in German sign language in the exhibition space.

**11.** See: [www.queer-crip.schwulesmuseum.de/en/index.html](http://www.queer-crip.schwulesmuseum.de/en/index.html). Accessed 1 August, 2022.

**12.** In their book *Queering the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 2020), Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton stress that curating as a professionalized practice follows a set of learned and often unspoken structural conventions, invisible protocols, and expected techniques. It produces and reproduces normalities within the framework of the exhibition and structures curatorial practice (p. 43). Sullivan and Middleton define the museum not just as an institution, as a place, but also a set of practices that cannot be separated from the contexts in which they operate. The museum is a way of doing (verb) as much as a thing (noun) since it contributes to world-making. For Sullivan and Middleton, queer curating challenges the so-called unspoken rules that structure musicological or curatorial practice.

**13.** Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 4.

and art institutions not only deal with (dis)abilities, but also consciously use the term crip and thus link up with activist discourses. ‘Crip Time’, curated by Susanne Pfeffer and Anna Sailer, in conversation with disabled artists Constantina Zavitsanos, Shannon Finnegan, and Judith Hopf, was on view at the Museum für Moderne Kunst (Museum of Modern Art) in Frankfurt from September 2021 to January 2022 and was dedicated to concepts of care and the vulnerability of the body. Not all of the forty-two artists involved self-identify as crip or disabled, although they all address and experience limitations in one way or another, for example those related to chronic or mental illnesses. In 2021, the Kunsthalle Osnabrück, located in the German town of the same name, under the direction of Anna Jaehle and Juliane Schickedanz, dedicated its entire annual programme to the theme of ‘Accessibility’. On the other side of the ocean, the group show ‘#CripRitual’, curated by Aimi Hamraie, Cassandra Hartblay, and Jarah Moesch, two of whom identify as disabled or sick, featured sixty-eight disabled artists in the first half of 2022 at Tangled Art + Disability and the Doris McCarthy Gallery in Toronto. In addition to the exhibition, all artworks were available online and both galleries offered virtual tours through the exhibitions. ‘Queering the Crip, Crippling the Queer’, curated by Birgit Bosold, Kate Brehme, and Kenny Frieswill, opened in September 2022 at Schwules Museum Berlin and was not solely devoted to contemporary artistic positions, but also showed historical documents and stated how it was ‘the first international exhibit exploring the multiple historical, cultural, and political intersections of queerness and disability’.<sup>11</sup>

In this essay I will outline three artistic exhibition projects that take on a crip or disabled perspective and deal with both cripdom and queerness. How do they queer and crip norms in general? How do they address institutional infrastructures in particular? Therefore, I understand institutions not only as, for example, physical spaces like the museum. Exhibitions themselves can be described as institutions in their own right with their own unwritten rules and own infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> This, on the one hand, corresponds to Robert McRuer’s perspective of institutions as ‘the dominant understanding of a significant and structuring cultural concept’.<sup>13</sup> In addition, I will also follow Marina Vishmidt’s

definition of infrastructure as intelligible.<sup>14</sup> Infrastructures shape not only how we experience space but how we encounter each other. Infrastructures are concerned with connecting people and things, and thus with constructing a common world. This understanding also corresponds with curator Binghao Wong's approach of queer curating, or 'queerating'. Wong proposes the term and concept of 'queerating' as a mode of collective care. For Wong, 'queerating' should focus on collaboration and strengthen queer communities and kinships as well as collectivity.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the following case studies experiment with the cultural meanings of crip and queer in theory, practice, and representation but also with different power structures and infrastructures. They demonstrate the invisibility and variety of crip, its potential, and its relation to temporality, space, and concepts of queer.

## **'Now Is the Time and Crip Is the Future'<sup>16</sup>: Crip Magazine by Eva Egermann**

*Crip Magazine* is a self-published magazine by Viennese artist and activist Eva Egermann. Since its first issue, which appeared in 2012, four more have been published, and all of them can be downloaded for free via [cripmagazine.evaegermann.com](http://cripmagazine.evaegermann.com) and are temporarily available in print. The magazine can be described as a collection of material on crip issues, art, and cultural production and representations. It also functions as a collective crip, queer, and feminist platform that gathers visual and text contributions from many different international cultural producers and artists. Furthermore, the magazine sees itself as an exhibition, since it can function as a kind of exhibition in its print version when taken apart and transformed into a wall newspaper.<sup>17</sup> So far, each issue has appeared under a specific theme<sup>18</sup>—the last issue was published in the autumn of 2022 within the framework of, and co-produced by, the 17th İstanbul Biennial and its curators Ute Meta Bauer, Amar Kanwar, and David Teh, as well as Elif Kamışlı and Erdem İlgi Akter (İKSÜ). The fourth issue, published in 2021, was an invitation in the context of 'KISS' at Kunsthalle Wien, an exhibition project with a series of artistic contributions and commissioned works in response to the stipulations and consequences of

14. Marina Vishmidt, 'Between Not Everything and Not Nothing: Cuts Toward Infrastructural Critique', eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh, *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2016), 266.

15. Binghao Wong, 'Queerating', *Auto Italia* (2015), [www.autoitaliasoutheast.org/blog/queerating/](http://www.autoitaliasoutheast.org/blog/queerating/). Accessed 1 August, 2022.

16. Eva Egermann, 'Editorial', *Crip Magazine* 2 (2017), 4.

17. Eva Egermann, 'Editorial', *Crip Magazine* 1 (2012), 3.

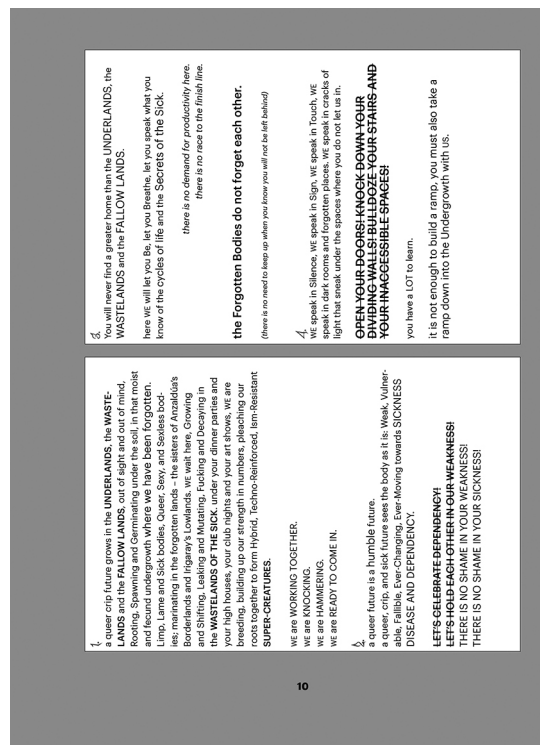
18. *Crippling Tyrol* (2012); *Crip Art Resources* (2017); *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead* (2019), *Die Wiener Ausgabe* [The Viennese Issue] (2021), *The Fermented Issue* (2022).

# crip

magazine issue 4, 2021  
DIE WIENER AUSGABE / THE VIENNA EDITION



Katta Spiel, *Handing out Real Virtuality*, 2020, drawing on cover *Crip Magazine* #4, 2021, cover, design Lana Grahek, publishers of *Crip Magazine* #4: Eva Egermann, Anne Faucheret, WHW (Ivet Ćurlin, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sabolović)



RA Walden, *Notes From The Underlands* (extract), 2019, contribution *Crip Magazine* #3, 2019, p.10

keeping one's distance during the pandemic and dealing with the power and potential of a kiss. This issue was co-published by Anne Faucheret and WHW (Ivet Ćurlin, Nataša Ilić, Sabina Sabolović).

Issue 3 was produced as part of Bergen Assembly's 'Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead', which comprised an exhibition and a discursive, performative, and mediation programme. *Crip Magazine* is situated across the fields of art, (artistic) research, and activism while constantly blurring these lines and definitions—and crippling them. It includes articles by artists and writers on the crip movement, interviews with crip scholars and activists, experimental texts, collages, drawings, poems, photographs, and Instagram posts by crip artists. The magazine comprises contributions by invited authors, while readers are also encouraged to write



or submit contributions. This makes the magazine a tool ‘to share the knowledge and experiences of emancipation and resistance’.<sup>19</sup>

As a publication that is a product of artistic research, *Crip Magazine* makes an important contribution to processes of crippling. Accessibility is ensured via different typefaces in each issue like Sassoon, a font created for early readers, or Dyslexic, a typeface developed especially for dyslexic people. The magazine is published in various formats that can also be read by screen readers and partly with picture descriptions, and hence it is accessible to crip communities. Simultaneously, it is a source of information for those who have had little exposure to crip issues and representations while creating strong visibility for different crip perspectives. Moreover, the magazine acts as a tool for self-empowerment and building an international queer-feminist-crip community. It creates a safe(r) space that can always dock onto other spaces such as institutions, but still remains independent. The magazine also becomes a globally accessible space, a crippled institution on its own in which crip perspectives become central instead of marginal, and are represented in their diversity. It also focuses on a constantly evolving process and is published irregularly, thereby conceptually referring to crip time. Crip time is understood as a time of living and surviving and of shaping the world.<sup>20</sup> It refuses chromonormativity<sup>21</sup> and productivity time and can be defined as flex time—time that adapts to the different needs of different

19. Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ, 'Editorial', *Crip Magazine* 3 (2019), 3.

20. Ellen Samuels and Elizabeth Freeman, 'Introduction: Crip Temporalities', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, 2 (April 2021), 249.

21. In *Time Binds: Queer Histories, Queer Temporalities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), Elizabeth Freeman conceptualizes the term chrononormativity as a structural measurement of temporal norms such as alleged societal milestones of a normative life, for instance marrying, having children, and buying a house, as well as temporal rhythms, such as weeks, weekends, and holidays, which always have an inherent norm of how time should be spent. Chrononormativity, therefore, structures experience and society and organizes human bodies.



22. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 27.

23. Samuels and Freeman, 'Introduction: Crip Temporalities', 250.

24. See: [www.les-nouveaux-riches.com/h13-gewinnerin-julischka-stengele/](http://www.les-nouveaux-riches.com/h13-gewinnerin-julischka-stengele/). Accessed 12 August, 2022.

individuals.<sup>22</sup> In this way, Egermann's project contributes to imagining 'a new world into being'.<sup>23</sup> *Crip Magazine* combines counter-hegemonic crip experiences, shares and creates crip forms of knowledge. It interrogates and unsettles entrenched understandings of disability in general and contributes to questioning the hierarchical infrastructures of magazines and art production in particular.

## **'Unapologetically Fat, Queer, and Femme/inist':<sup>24</sup>**

**'BALLAST | EXISTENZ' by Julischka Stengele at Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna**

An artist who has also contributed to *Crip Magazine* and who also lives in Vienna is Julischka Stengele. Stengele was the recipient of the 2020 H13 Lower Austria Prize for Performance, which resulted in her project 'BALLAST | EXISTENZ', an exhibition held in September 2020 at Kunstraum Niederösterreich in Vienna and directed by Katharina Brandl. Within the framework of 'BALLAST | EXISTENZ', Stengele critically examined at that time how some people are portrayed as a social and economic burden during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and thereby labelled as 'dispensable'. The exhibition was framed by a performance on the day of the opening: a heavy-duty crane moved a person who was in a bag or sack made of industrial tarpaulin, in front of the exhibition space, and dumped them on a kind of rubbish heap with several black and blue rubbish bags. The person was then given the prize and a bouquet of flowers and taken away again in the bag with the construction vehicle. This already referred to the overall aesthetic and thematic and material approach of the multimedia installation within the space, even before the doors were actually opened. Here, many things seemed raw or rough. Unprocessed industrial materials appeared to be in an intermediate state. Elements known from the medical sector, on the one hand, and from the building market or construction sites, not yet processed, on the other, occupied the space. Various readymades were framed by a room painted in medical mint green. Several mattresses were





# BALLAST EXISTENZ

Julischka Stengele

## H13 Niederösterreich Preis für Performance

Wer muss, wer darf und wer kann Leistung erbringen – gerade in Zeiten der COVID-19-Krise? Ju- Oder anders gefragt: Wer kann performen? Julischka Stengele geht der Doppeldeutigkeit des Begriffs Performance nach: Performance als gesellschaftlicher Leitbegriff für Leistung und Performance als künstlerisches Medium. Ihr prämiertes Projekt BALLAST | EXISTENZ beschäftigt sich unter anderem damit, wie in Zeiten der Covid-19-Krise bestimmte Bevölkerungsgruppen als gesellschaftliche und wirtschaftliche Belastung dargestellt werden. Stengele setzt sich kritisch mit der medialen und realpolitischen Entwertung derjenigen auseinander, die dem derzeit erwünschten Leistungsbegriff nicht entsprechen. Sie zieht Parallelen zwischen dem faschistischen Mythos vom gesunden, leistungsfähigen Körper und der permanenten Ausbeutung der Ressource Mensch in einer kapitalistischen Gesellschaft und verknüpft diese mit der aktuellen, von der Covid-19-Pandemie geprägten Situation. Denn die elementare Frage, die sich in Diskussionen über „Risikogruppen“ stellt, und die niemand direkt ansprechen will, lautet: Wer ist verzichtbar?

Performance: 03. 09. 2020  
Laufzeit: 04. 09. – 12. 09. 2020

Ausstellung mit Arbeiten von Julischka Stengele und Magdalena Fischer

## H13 Lower Austria Prize for Performance

Who has to, who is allowed to, who can deliver performance, especially in times of the COVID-19 pandemic? Julischka Stengele explores the ambiguity of the term "performance": performance as a guiding economic concept in society and performance as a medium in art. Her awarded project BALLAST | EXISTENZ addresses the representation of certain social groups who are often framed as being a burden for both economy and society – especially since the Covid-19 crisis. Stengele focuses on the ongoing devaluation of those bodies who are not willing or unable to adjust to the overwhelming demands of capitalism today. She draws parallels between contemporary debates about productivity and worthiness and fascist ideologies of the "healthy" productive body. She investigates how these ideological factors can play an important part in current discussions about the Covid-19 pandemic and so-called "high-risk groups". Because in the end, it all comes back to one question: Who is dispensable?

Performance: 03. 09. 2020  
Duration: 04. 09. – 12. 09. 2020

Exhibition with works from Julischka Stengele and Magdalena Fischer





Julischka Stengele, *BALLAST / EXISTENZ*, 2020, installation view. Photo: Eva Würdinger

arranged in the space, some of them on pallets that were either too small or too big for them, while others were on the floor, and one was leaning against the wall. Some mattresses were covered with sheets, others with visible stains. Printed on the sheets was the word *Krankenstand*—the official term in Austria for ‘sick leave’. The term framed the print of

**25.** I am deliberately using the term fat, which has been appropriated and reinterpreted by and within the fat empowerment and fat acceptance movement since the nineteen-sixties. Similar to queer and crip, this term is and has been used as a swear word and is supposed to lose its discriminating power through self-appropriation.

**26.** Sandahl, 'Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance,' 37.

**27.** Wall text in the exhibition 'BALLAST | EXISTENCE', Kunstraum Niederösterreich, 4/09–12/09/2020.

a drink in a glass, reminiscent of a cocktail. Three of the so-called beds had wooden constructions with handles to pull up above them, bearing comparison with hospital beds. Next to one of the bed sculptures was a box containing an insulating blanket and bricks. Black-and-blue-filled rubbish bags were piled up in two other corners of the room. A large industrial construction container full of rubble was placed next to a short text by Stengele, taken from her column for the feminist Viennese magazine *an.schläge*. Four of these columns, dedicated to the discriminatory everyday life of fat bodies,<sup>25</sup> were displayed in the exhibition space. A video work by visual artist Magdalena Fischer, with Stengele as the main protagonist, as well as a podcast with Stengele and director Katharina Brandl, complemented the room installation. In the context of 'BALLAST | EXISTENCE', the artist emphasizes the extent to which bodies that are seen and labelled as sick are understood as a burden in our society. Drastic figurative metaphors declare bodies to be superfluous, useless, and disposable—right down to rubbish and debris, emphasized by the exhibition's coarse and raw aesthetics that seem unfinished, used, or unkind. Stengele does not aestheticize or embellish, but confronts the audience with the structures of the social and medical system in an unadorned and sometimes almost painful way while repeatedly addressing the intersection of ableist and anti-fat discrimination within the framework of these systems. Consequently, Stengele's practice also corresponds to Carrie Sandahl's definition of crippling, in that she 'spin[s] mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects'.<sup>26</sup> In 'BALLAST | EXISTENCE', the body—even though it is mostly invisible—is always part of a construction site and needs to be worked on, needs to be 'repaired' so that it is socially accepted and valued. The exhibition constantly challenges the 'fascistic ideologies of the "healthy" productive body'.<sup>27</sup> Stengele's strategies of crippling include humour, exaggeration, and DIY aesthetics. By playing with words and designations, by using wit and exaggeration, the artist cripples the art space focusing on ableism, anti-fat discrimination, and fatphobia. The exhibition space is also being 'queerated' in the understanding of Binghao Wong: by inviting other feminist collaborators such as Magdalena Fischer and referring to the feminist magazine *an.schläge*,

the artist moves beyond their own experiences within her art and creates a space for community and queer-feminist exchange, focusing on collectivity. Additionally, the title of the exhibition serves as a reference to the blog under the same name by non-binary artist, writer, and autism activist Mel Baggs, who passed away in April 2020, and thereby connects and references queer and crip influences.

28. Kafer, 'After Crip, Crip Afters,' 421.

29. See: [www.meltionary.com/MELT.html](http://www.meltionary.com/MELT.html). Accessed 16 August, 2022.

## **Think[ing] About What Disability Does Rather Than Simply What It Is:<sup>28</sup>**

**'heat, encounter or another friction' by MELT  
(Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr) at the Kansas City  
Art Institute**

The Berlin-based arts-design duo MELT (Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr) focus on 'questions around material transformations alongside impulses from trans\* feminism and disability justice'.<sup>29</sup> Working at the intersections of trans\*, queer, and disabled identities, their solo exhibition 'heat, encounter or another friction' was on view at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI) from November 2021 to February 2022. Six multimedia works were on display, along with an essay by artist and head of KCAI's Social Practice programme, Sean Nash, and included questions and instructions to explore and interact with the exhibition individually. One of the works, *Rituals Against Barriers*, consists of a series of small wedges made mainly of wood and plastic, reminiscent of doorstops in size and shape. They are placed close together on the floor, almost as if someone had thrown them there. Most of them have words like 'access' or statements like 'no assimilation' on them. While doors define, determine, and limit access to physical places, doorstoppers create and hold open space. They are small objects that can facilitate movements and have an inviting effect, allowing easy access and exit without having to open doors with limbs, and, therefore, can make spaces easily accessible. A poster with different ritual practices questioning and opposing various normativities was another component of the work. Here, six different rituals of un/learning are listed, and can be seen as rituals of joy, refusal, collective practice, discomfort, and confusion. All





MELT (Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr), *Rituals Against Barriers*, 2021, installation view. A series of wood wedges standing up and lying down on a grey floor of an exhibition space. In the background is a white wall with writing on it and a white shelf with posters on it.

**30.** MELT (Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr), 'Con(fuse)ing and Re(fusing) Barriers', *Research Refusal* 10, No. 1 (2021), 70.

of them seem to make invisible structures visible, question institutions and disorder their infrastructures, and dissolve the categories 'normal' and 'abnormal' for a short moment. In this way, they contribute in 'make[ing] space for other worlds'.<sup>30</sup> Some of the rituals are based on or inspired by





MELT (Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr), *Rituals Against Barriers*, 2021, installation view.  
A series of four wood wedges and two plastic wedges standing up and lying down on the floor. They read 'Welcome', 'Access is Friction', and 'No Assimilation'.

**NON-NORMATIVE ACCESS PRACTICES & ACCESS AS PRACTICE, NOT AS SOLUTION**

Access as a practice is not value neutral and can be, depending on who's knowing-making it takes into account and who is not, assimilation or a practice of solidarity and love.

In the *Crip Technoscience Manifesto* Aimee Hamraie and Kelly Fitzsch conceptualize access as inherently frictional: "While historically central to the fights for disability access, crip technoscience is nevertheless committed to pushing beyond liberal and assimilation-based approaches to accessibility, which emphasize inclusion in mainstream society, to pursue access as friction, particularly paying attention to access-making as disabled peoples' acts of non-compliance and protest." (p. 10) Quelling from friction and listening they give the example of "an image of a powerchair user wheeling against traffic on a street without curb cuts" (p. 11) which they describe as "not an attempt to integrate (as in the liberal approach to disability rights), but rather to use technology as a friction against an inaccessible environment." Friction creates heat and movement, and for this shows the potential of refusal as a generative force. We wish to uphold the knowledge that access for disabled people has not happened through the benevolence of institutions, but the continuous protests and inventiveness of disabled people. When comes to access, we ask: Does a given approach to access position disability as a way of knowing-making or does it understand disability as something to be "overcome" so that a legal requirement can be checked? Does an access practice transform the space or institution, for example because everyone is allowed a break?

Another access framework, in which the knowledge of disabled people is centered, is understanding access as love, which is what Ila Kingso, Alex Wong and Sandyino propose. In their work, access making is potentially rejecting, unmovable and full of potential.

**RIUAL FOR DOORS**

You can perform this ritual when you are standing or sitting in a door frame. Trace the frame and dimensions of the door with your eyes or hands. Ask, depending on bravery, situation and voice, loudly or in your head: "Is this door open for \*"? For c, choose or not: disabled people, wheelchair users, trans people, Black people, neurodivergent people, poor people, people of color, queer people. If not, make a commitment to open it.

**QUESTIONING COLONIAL ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS**

Who gets to produce knowledge? Why are the people who do when they are? We are thinking about access in and in the institutional systems that are built upon and upholding colonialism, militarism, aggression, and rape. These continuously are hard coded into institutional processes of all sorts, which colonizes and stand in the way of what Sylvia Wynter describes as "universal enlightenment": the unquestionable reason, value, and authority that is the illusion of all colonial constructs (2009, 47). As Hamraie & Fitzsch write in the *Crip Technoscience Manifesto*, we must: "Jettison the conditions and transformative power of crip knowing-making under these systems" (p. 20) We wish to unsettle and remake institutional practices – instead of only calling for access into a field built on epistemic violences, we wish to engage access knowledge to imagine alternatives and transform institutions.

**RIUAL FOR QUESTIONING INSTITUTIONS**

Next time you are at an institution of any sort: academic, immigration, medical, judicial, transport take note of where is present. Why are they there? What are they doing? Who isn't there? What would be different if those missing people were there too?

**REFUSING LINEAR TIME**

We are thinking about access with Crip and Trans\* time. Crip time, as Ellen Samuels writes, "is time travel. Disability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a vortex of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, ledges, intervals and abrupt endings." (2017) Queer/Trans\* time, as Reese Simkins write, emerges from the tangibility of embodied experience according to a nonlinear framework where past, present and future converge and make chrononormativity time that undermines much of human experience (2016). Crip and Trans\* time refuse chrononormativity and productivity time. Engaging time as a material practice we wish to untangle linear notions of time that produce catastrophes (as though everything is happening for the first time, individuation (as though there is no collective knowledge of survival), and separation (as though the only way to survive is to further racial socio-economic inequalities).

**RIUAL FOR SLOW TIME**

We have set up a "world of feet" – a browser environment in which you can write collaboratively and in a spatial, non-linear way. This ritual is an invitation for you to respond to these questions: When have you refused a timeline that was given to you? What happened when you did? Is there any current timeline that does not feel like your speed? <https://www.sourdisident.com/SlowTime>

Feel free to answer in as much detail as you like. You can either answer all questions in one place or scatter your answers along the page.

**REFUSING CARCERAL SYSTEMS AND DIVESTING FROM RETAIL**

The Abolition & Disability Justice Collective write on their website <https://abojournalcollective.org/>: "Prisons and policing are not the only carceral systems. Involvement in social work and psychiatric agencies is often framed as an "alternative" to policing and prisons. But mental health systems are also carceral and punishing. At the heart of these so-called "gentle" policing systems, people who are neurodivergent and/or disabled are simultaneously noncompliantly subjected to violence, incarceration and discrimination, and also excluded from shaping decisions directly impacting their lives."

We are thinking about the actions proposed by divesting as a verb, as well as refusal as a noun. To begin we listed a few of words connected to refusing: strip, resist, make space, boycott, practice otherwise, refusal, resistant, to refuse, direct, refuse, resistance, say no, rituals of refusal, dispossession, removal, exclude. What would it mean to divest from capitalism as a commitment of our shared practices?

**RIUAL FOR ABOLITION**

Make a list of ways to address harm and conflict in your everyday life that do not relate to punishment or incarceration.

**CRIP FAILURE & NEUROQUEER REFUSAL**

In their article *Bad Listeners*, Jonathan Smiles develops a neuroqueer theory of bad listening. In feminist discourses, rhetorical listening is politicized as valuable, leaving out or implicitly describing the listening practices of neurodivergent listeners as failure. Smiles reads bad listening, which they connect to sensory or social overwhelm, as not simply failure, but as a starting point to imagine and practice other forms of listening. Following M. Benji Ferguson's description of neuroqueers as those folks who "perform the perversity of their neurotypes", I invoke the figure of the Bad Listener as an example of neuroqueer resistance, as a person who honors their neurodivergent demand for perverse forms of listening, which regularly fall outside nondisabled norms for what is good, productive, and appropriate communication (2017). Here, refusal is a way of accepting neither the logic of pathologization nor the compliance with norms that were never created with disabled ways of knowing-making in mind. We ask: How much room is in academic spaces for bad listening and which norms of listening or showing attentiveness are exposed through the practices of bad listening?

**RIUAL FOR BAD LISTENING**

Take a piece of paper or your smartphone and for 5 minutes, write down every sound that you hear (the humming of the heater, the chirping of a bird...). Alternatively you can write down everything that you sense (the temperature in the room, the brightness of the light). Repeat this ritual in different settings if possible. When and where are you comfortable with listening/seeing? Do you listen (sense deeper with time)? Are any of the things you hear/see an access barrier for you or for someone you know? You can use this ritual as a way of checking in with a new space.

**TUNING TOWARDS THE "NOT PERCEIVABLE"**

We are thinking about access with varying permeable interfaces instead of the binary of "barrier" or "barrier free". Some interfaces make systems, subjects and organizations meet and interact, while others create access towards one side or miscommunicate in all directions. Along interfaces, that manifest for example as membranes, exchange happens between different structural and differently structuring materials. These materials co-constitute each other through the specific configuration of their interface's permeability. Permeability is often less too small or not vocal enough to be perceived by human senses and especially by human eyes. What kinds of access possibilities make access possible? Does accessibility require categorical or medical knowledge, or, asked differently: if one refuses to make oneself known as trans\* or disabled or neuroqueer but asks for access, what kinds of access practices emerge? What kinds of reaching and "seeing" make for heavy, concrete, textual, embodied, ancestral, whatever, haptic, drawing based accessibility?

**RIUAL FOR TENDING TO THE "NOT PERCEIVABLE"**

From Undrowned by Alexia Pauline Gumbs, spend time with the question: "What becomes possible when we are connected in the queerness of forms of life that dominant systems cannot chart, reward or even understand?"

MELT (Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr), *Rituals Against Barriers*, 2021, poster.  
A poster with six rituals and a detailed explanation and derivation of each. Each ritual is illustrated with a small icon: wooden wedge; wooden log and rubber mallet foam mattress; golden pyramid or rocket; pink wedge heel shoe with glitter; and a yellow plastic block.

31. McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, 2.

32. Ibid.

33. For various approaches and reflections on non-normative time, see for example Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), and Ellen Samuels' 'Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time,' *Disability Studies Quarterly* Vol. 37, No. 3 (Summer 2017).

different thinkers and activists, for example Johnathan Smilges, a scholar in the field of disability, queer, and trans\* studies, and writer, poet, and activist Alexis Pauline Gumbs. Thus, *Rituals Against Barriers* creates a space for shared ritual and embodied inclusive experiences based on the experiences and reflections of crip, disabled, and trans\* people and thus focuses on reciprocity and relationality. Britton and Paehr crip by pointing out where access needs to be made and improved, by marking invisibilities, opening up the excluding power structures behind the supposed naturalness of dis/ability and especially by imagining infrastructures differently. As a result, access becomes a creative material and methodology. With reference to Robert McRuer, MELT's *Rituals Against Barriers* criticizes 'the system of compulsory able-bodiedness'.<sup>31</sup> This system, as McRuer argues, 'produces disability' and 'is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness: that, in fact, compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa',<sup>32</sup> meaning that heterosexuality as a supposedly invisible norm—as well as cis-bodiedness, I would like to add—creates queerness just as supposed invisible able-bodiedness creates the disabled subject. The work *Rituals Against Barriers* confronts the audience with these invisible norms. Another crucial material within the work is time and temporality. MELT examines ways of queering and crippling by questioning linear time and by emphasizing rituals and routines and, therefore, repetitions and by (re-)defining them as pleasurable and playful yet powerful strategies. The audience is encouraged to pause for a moment, to reflect and embody the ritual, which also cripps their time. Thus, this work becomes part of queer, trans\*, and crip discourses about time and temporality that have always claimed that time cannot be understood as linear for disabled or for queer and trans\* bodies.<sup>33</sup>

## **Conclusion: Queering and Crippling Time, Representations, and (Infra-)Structures**

The projects and exhibitions by MELT (Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr), Julischka Stengele, and Eva Egermann served

to demonstrate the variety of *crip* as a verb and *cripping* as an artistic practice. In particular, its potential and relation to temporality, community, infrastructures, and concepts of queer became visible. The artistic exhibition projects create alternative *crip* temporalities, highlight critically disabled and queer perspectives, and resist, to a large extent, able-bodied heteronormativity. Accordingly, *cripping* cannot only be reduced to the representation of *crip* bodies. While the body always takes on an important role, the case studies presented mostly do not depict bodies—the body is always present but rarely visible. *Cripping* is mainly practiced by either naming ableist structures or by temporarily trying to transform different infrastructures with and within artistic exhibition practices. The case studies experiment with the cultural meanings of *crip* and queer in theory, practice, and representation; they correspond with Binghao Wong's approach of 'queerating' as a mode of collective care, always focusing on collaboration and strengthening communities and kinships, as well as collectivity. All these presented projects recognize but also 'unsettle entrenched understandings of disability and community'<sup>34</sup> and act antagonistically towards the normative desire to 'cure' disability, focusing instead on the social structures that label and limit bodies and subjects. They celebrate the intersection of queerness and *cripdom* by re-imagining relationships, communities, cultural representations, and power structures. For all of them, *cripping* time is of importance, albeit practiced in a different way. Since time within Western neoliberalism is always forward-looking with a supposedly straight line of productivity, *crip* time can mean silence, slowness, and repetition. But it cannot only be reduced to slowness. Disability is often labelled as something that has no future, or as something that an ableist society wants to avoid in the future. The projects presented, however, look at the present but also refer to futurity. They create alternative *crip* temporalities by imagining and evoking a future that stands for care, solidarity, compassion, empathy, relationality, and accessibility. *Cripdom* and *crip* time can be understood as a space offering new kinds of connections and presence that are fundamental to imagining a new world into being<sup>35</sup>—somewhere on the future horizon beyond straight composition.

**34.** Hutcheon and Wolbring, "Crippling" Resilience: Contributions from Disability Studies to Resilience Theory'.

**35.** Samuels and Freeman, 'Introduction: Crip Temporalities', 250.

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