The Inarticulate Post-Socialist Crip

On the Cruel Optimism of Neoliberal Transformations in the Czech Republic[1]

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Introduction

In 2009, twenty years past the collapse of state socialism in Czechoslovakia, Jan Potměšil,[2] disabled in a car-accident during protest work in 1989, is reported to have said: "If I was to choose between the rule of communists and being able to walk again, I would take the chair" (cited in Remešová, translation by author). The quote is illuminating even if its tabloid source may make us doubt its authenticity. It reveals that discourses of post-socialism were rich with prosthetic narratives of disability, rehabilitation, and cure. It also reveals the importance of discourses of post-socialist 'transformation' for shaping political consciousness in the Czech Republic of today. This short anecdote foreshadows some of the central questions of my article: What does the symbolic juxtaposition of dis/ability and "the rule of communists" mean for the introduction of (neoliberal) capitalism into the Czechoslovakia? And – most importantly – how did it influence epistemologies of disability and the im/possibility of what we might term, adapting José Muñoz, 'crip horizons?'

The possibility of critical imaginaries and visions of the political are central to my exploration here. In my reading of the early years of post-socialist

1 | This essay originally appeared in *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8.3 (2014): 257–274. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of the editor of JLCDS for which I am grateful.

2 | In the revolutionary autumn of 1989, Potměšil was one of the students, artists and activists travelling around the Czech Republic to spread support for the regime change. Interestingly, becoming disabled turned Potměšil into an impromptu embodiment of the revolution as his 'incapacitated' body was transfigured into a symbolic sacrifice for the collective freedom (and capacity).

transformation I am looking for a "structure of feeling," the name Raymond Williams uses for the residue of shared historical experiences (128), or what Lauren Berlant terms "affective attachments," "a structure of relationality" (Berlant 13); a structure of feeling that reflects how much "[i]t matters how we arrive at the places we do" (Ahmed, *Queer* 2), individually as well as collectively. The affective politics of the post-socialist transformation leads me to explore the conditions for intelligibility of political and social concepts and imaginaries; this is one of the meanings I invoke with the concept of horizon. The affects, I argue, help to pose the questions of 'political horizon:'

> "What are the factors that make political action conceivable at all, or that make some forms of activism thinkable while others are, or become, wholly unimaginable? How do attitudes within a social group or collectivity about what is politically possible, desirable, and necessary – what I call a political horizon – get established, consolidated, stabilized, and reproduced over time, and with what sorts of effects on political action?" (Gould 3)

The following discussion traces two lines of argument. First, I reveal how disability metaphors and broader ideological structures of health and compulsory able-bodiedness were appropriated to fuel the optimism of the post-revolutionary years. I argue that a curative logic smoothed the way and provided legitimation for the neoliberal transformations. Second, I cruise through the disability journalism of the early 1990s to explore the disability positionalities articulated there.[3]

The larger question that underlies my ruminations on the 1990s addresses the cultural and contextual contingencies of toxic attachments to optimism, progress, and an affective politics of positivity in the present moment of austerity. The theses that I propose complicate the affective attachments to optimistic visions of free, democratic futurity by arguing that these visions cruelly reduced the meaning of freedom to the freedom of the market and foreclosed more complex negotiations of the meaning of 'the social.' As my analysis indicates, the post-revolution euphoria transmuted quite rashly into the form of affectivity that Berlant defines as "cruel optimism" and which she summarises as a relation in which "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (2). The cruel optimism of the post-socialist moment in Czechoslovakia, I propose, has been forclosing the possibility of crip epistemologies. In the post-socialist moment when social belonging

3 | Specifically, for the purposes of this article, I lean on an analysis of two journals: *Elán* (*Vigour*) and Vozíčkář (*The Wheelchair User*); the former is a journal platform of the official and state-sanctioned *The Union of Invalids* (*Svaz Invalidů*) and as such represents a continuity with the era of the state socialism. The latter, on the other side, is a new journal founded after the regime change and as an explicit critique of *Elán.*

appears defined (and conditioned) by the compulsory affects of curative positivity, cripness is an impossible location; it is unintelligible and lies beyond the conceivable, thinkable, and imaginable political horizon.

Yet, there is a different meaning of horizon that speaks to this impossibility of crip(ness) in the times of post-socialist rehabilitation into/through neo-liberalism. Making Muñoz's imagination more generously accommodating and accessible, we could envision "[cripness] [as] not yet here [and as] ideality [...] that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (*Cruising* 1). The metaphor of the inarticulate crip that I offer here gestures towards such a horizon transgressing the "presentness" (25) and of the normatively progressive futurity of straight *and* abled time (of rehabilitation, shock therapies and cure) and thus, as I argue toward the end of the article, allows us to revisit and complicate the past to forge different versions of desires for crip futures.

The following image elucidates the metaphor and the ways in which it allows for imagining a cripness defiant to compulsory positivity and optimism.

Jan Šibík, "Untitled." [4]

The image captures two women, half-clad/half-naked, sitting face-to-face, one on a hospital bed, one in front of it. The drab environment, the pills, used cups, and fashion magazines surrounding the women tell a story of sickness and an improvised/impoverished home. However, the women are so engrossed in each

4 | Photograph used with permission of the photographer.

other that the markers of illness, death, and destitution seem to disappear in a momentous bliss of erotic and mutual care.

The image is a part of larger series titled *I Do Not Want To Die Yet* (Šibík, *Chci ještě žít*; translation by author), which received a lot of attention as well as critical acclaim in the Czech Republic in 2004. The work of Jan Šibík, a Czech photographer well-applauded for his 'humanitarian projects,' the series documents life in an asylum in Odessa, Ukraine, where people with AIDS were left to themselves; those who still could cared for those closer to death.

The whole series is waiting for an overdue critical intervention: it fetishizes AIDS and death, it exploits narratives of tragedy and despair, it objectifies both the people photographed and their ill bodies, and, most importantly, it traffics in images of a post-Soviet 'AIDS-infested Ukraine' to bolster Czech pride in capitalist success and post-socialist overcoming. And yet, the images invite *crip signing*, a crip version of "homosexual hearing," a stratagem for reading culture (and cultural texts) against the grain for the purpose of survival and crafting alternative futures (Marga Gomez cited in Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 3). "Crip signing," like "homosexual hearing," is a form of "disidentification," a tactic "that neither opts to assimilate [...] nor strictly oppose [dominant ideologies]" but rather "works on and against dominant ideology" (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 2) at its seams. Crip signing is a critical gesture towards something that is not fully articulated, something that cannot be expressed in the language of identity and political pragmatism. Taking its cue from Marga Gomez, who heard the calling of homosexuality in moments of ambivalence that combined desire with shame, or recognition with abjection, crip signing in this particular image can be imagined as a moment that 'disses' the ideologies of (heterosexual) sexuality but also ideological notions of health, reproductive femininity, able-bodied longevity, and, most acutely, the compulsorily optimistic visions of cure. Crip signing, like homosexual hearing, paradoxically crafts survival out of abjection and stigma.

This (lesbian) crip picture captures a powerful clash between failure and sustenance.[5] In their 'AIDS-as-death-sentence' existence, the two women are meant to embody 'failure' in relation to ideologies of vitality and able-bodied health, as well as ideologies of (hetero)normative femininity. Yet despite its rawness and the ways in which it actually emphasises the visual markers of illness, the image signifies (however ephemeral, however crip) thriving. It attaches the women's bodies to each other by acts of interdependent care, while their ambivalent positioning allows – even calls for – sexual fantasies, turning the two women into subjects of (each other's) desire. In this, they paradoxically embody a moment of careless sorority and of mutual care/pleasure. The ways in which the 'failure' of AIDS/illness can be turned into sustaining cripness;

5 | I use the term 'lesbian' here to denote forms of gendered intimacy, closeness, care, and erotics *neither* dependent on nor wholly defined by the notion of lesbian identity.

the intimate relationality that challenges the individualising medical narrative; the pleasure/desire that is an "angry fist in the eye" (Wade 24) to narratives of fatality and despair; and the embodiment and practices of care reveal not only the negligence of the Ukrainian state but, more importantly, a challenge to the narrative of capitalism's global success and the vision of capitalism as the only chance at futurity.

Yet, the crip signing so clear now remained long inarticulate to me despite the fact that the series of photographs was on my syllabus for an AIDS politics class for several years. How had I not responded to the complicated network of pleasures/hurt the image embodies and speaks to? What cripistemological lessons can be drawn from this personal experience with the un/intelligibility of *crip signing*? These are some of the questions that inspire the remainder of my analysis. Genealogies of disability in a post-socialist Czechoslovakia may shed more light on why crip epistemologies have been unintelligible (and not viable) in this specific geo-political location. But despite the focus on a specific location, the theses and questions that I put forth in this article have a broader radius. Cruising the geopolitical time and place that no longer exists poses challenges to discussions and critical reflections on neoliberalism and austerity in the present moment. More specifically, it opens a critical dialogue with epistemologies of disability and cripness developed mostly from Western/global North experiences. In particular, the various figurations of the inarticulate/inarticulable crip problematize epistemologies of disability that expunge ambiguity and require fully-developed and articulated identity positions. In brief, the post-socialist crip appears to be precisely the "disorientation device" (Ahmed, *Queer* 171) to attune us to what has been slipping to "the point at which things fleet" (172) away from safe and 'positive' epistemologies. Such a disorientation is necessary if we are to imagine crip horizons.

Disability Semantics of Transition and Capitalist Rehabilitations

Exploring the 'post' of socialism, Katherine Verdery prefaces her book *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* by a short retort, which in its beautiful irony seems to capture the prevailing logic of the historical moment: "Q: What is the definition of socialism? A: The longest and most painful route from capitalism to capitalism." Similarly, one of the sociological studies led by an ambition to provide a concise version of the Czech history in the 20th century reflects the same sentiment in its title *On the Road from Capitalism to Capitalism* (Kabele). It presents a vision of the modern Czech/oslovak history as a cyclical move 'from capitalism to socialism and back,' where the 40-year period of state socialism is posed as a temporary deviation, an unfortunate false turn "on the road

from capitalism to capitalism." Indicated already in the rhetorical exercise of Verdery's Q and A, the belief that there is no other future than global capitalism punctuated cultural imaginations of the 'transformation' of post-socialist Czechoslovakia: it ran through pop culture, academic representations of the process, and the many foreign reflections on the events of the period. In this preliminary archaeology of the discourse of transformation, I am interested in unearthing its dependence upon ideologies of cure and recuperation that have played a crucial role not only in situating discourses of disability but, even more crucially, *all* visions of the social.

Elaine Weiner organised the dominant significations of socialism and capitalism that circulated (not only) in the 1990s into a neatly illustrative table that helps to draw out the highly normative evaluations of both political regimes (58):

Planned economy	**Market economy**
Evil	Good
Failure	Success
East	West/Europe
Past	Future
Constraint/Captivity	Opportunity/Freedom
Premodernity/Uncivilised	Modernity/Civilisation
Stagnation/Regression	Development/Progress
Abnormality/Artificiality	Normality/Naturality
Human design	Human nature
Irrationality	Rationality
Immorality	Morality
Collectivism	Individualism

The binary structure makes it sardonically clear that ascribing failure to socialism/communism functions as a projection enabling the imagined successes of capitalism. Weiner's table reveals also the extent to which economic markers and structures became the criteria and defining characteristics for evaluating societies; indeed, the conflation of freedom with a market economy

persists as the hegemonic vision until the present. This is the cruel aftermath of the transformation period.[6]

Even if unreflected in Weiner's analysis, these binaries reveal the extent to which an epistemology of the socialist other is hoisted upon a negative semantics of disability and the extent to which the passage from a failed communism/socialism – state of regression, immorality and irrationality – corresponds to semantic and ideological structures which, drawing on work of Henri-Jacques Stiker, Robert McRuer terms a "cultural grammar of rehabilitation" (*Crip* 108-116; for the term 112; see also Stiker).[7] Semantics of illness and disability crop up everywhere in early evaluations of a post-socialist and post-revolution Czechoslovakia. Already the first New Year's Presidential address introduced a metaphoric of malady as Václav Havel opened his message to the citizenry with a bitter pill and spoke of the state's decline: "our country does not flourish" (Havel "Novoroční projev;" translation by author).[8] He later made references to sickness explicit and added a clear moral impetus: "[In socialism] we became morally ill" (ibid.). The same rhetoric also pervades the State of the Czech Republic Address from March 1990 delivered by the then Prime Minister, Petr Pithart. He characterised communism as a health risk, blamed it for "the loss of general *immunity*" of the whole population, and identified it as "the most dangerous *bomb ticking away in our organisms*" (Pithart, "Zpráva" 9; emphases added). These brief examples hopefully suffice to indicate not only the extent to which the political imaginary of the post-revolution moment relied upon visions of sickness and malignancy, but also that these visions – as is very clearly indicated by the metaphor of ticking bomb – could be deployed as part of a moral appeal for (rehabilitative) transformation.

Thus the process of 'transition' from socialism into the new social order could be dubbed literally the 'path to recovery' and 'cure' ("The prevention is not enough, cure is necessary here;" Pithart "Programové"), while the immediacy

6 | A few days prior to finalizing this article, the Czech Republic held pre-term elections, following the fall of the right-wing government responsible for austerity measures. In a bizarre outcome representing the general frustration and growing precarity, Andrej Babiš, a billionaire and entrepreneur, was close to winning the election. He promised to "run the state as a firm" in order to be a good manager in this state/entrepreneurship hybrid.

7 | Notions of rehabilitation resound in the dominant significations attached to the process of the transition. Phrases such as "the return to Europe" or the "rediscovery of civil society" (see Hann 10) attributed to the development in post-socialist countries is illustrative of the process of othering of (post-)socialism and of the power dynamic between the 'East' and 'West.'

8 | All subsequent quotations from Czech sources have been translated into English by the author.

and desperate acuteness of the metaphoric ticking bomb legitimised the shock nature of this recovery: "The path to recovery will be very difficult. [...] Every step of the reforms will cause a shock from which we will have to learn again and again how to recover" (Pithart, "Zpráva" 10). Arguably, the trauma caused by the process of recovery (from the malignancy of the communist past) functions as both a means to overcome the sickness and as a means of (moral) cleansing.

The extent to which ideologies of *ability and health* are utilised to celebrate/legitimise the new social order of neoliberal capitalism raises new questions for the critical exploration of discourses of transformation and their formative impact upon the present. What does it mean for future visions of society and sociality that socialism and communism are signified as harmful and unhealthy anomalies to the presumed universal (and universally capitalist) social order, to the "assumed prior, normal state" (Stiker cited in McRuer, *Crip* 111)? Why and how do ideologies of health and ability give legitimacy to the new social order? What repercussions for crip and disability politics follow from figuring the post-socialist and current political regime as the result of successful rehabilitative therapy?

The import of these questions goes well beyond the scale of disability critique. The rehabilitative grammar of post-socialist transition had ramifications for all critical projects and transformative visions of social parity and social justice in post-socialist Czechoslovakia. Understanding this genealogy is important for understanding the politics of austerity governing the present moment in the Czech Republic.

Cruel Velvet Promises

The semantics of rehabilitation bequeaths us a language propelled by promises: promises of health, normalcy, functionality, and prosperity – all that seemed to be encapsulated in the early 1990s by the promise of the new social order and of capitalist democracy in post-socialist Czechoslovakia. Yet, as Lauren Berlant assures, some promises are cruel. She cautions, "[w]here cruel optimism operates, the very vitalising or animating potency of an object/scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place" (Berlant 24-5). In the following section, I trace more thoroughly how post-revolution euphoria transmuted into the form of affectivity Berlant terms "cruel optimism." As I read these cruel velvet promises, my main interest is in drawing out the ways in which people with disabilities identified with the 'affective public' of post-socialist Czechoslovakia, thereby investing in visions of the promising future that proved cruel to crip horizons.

The most powerful promise is articulated through visions of reparation and overcoming of the failings of the past regime. The change in regime brought hope for an end to "the long-standing rule of clichés, promises and unfulfilled demands and needs;" it generated the expectation that "*even in* our Czechoslovakia, everyone with a health disability (*zdravotním postižením*) [will be able to] enjoy full rights" (Váchalová n. pag.; emphasis added). In a letter to the then prime minister, *The Union of Invalids* (Svaz Invalidů) claimed to be ready to cooperate with the government on their "shared mission" to remedy "the painful aspects of life in our state" and to secure that "*every citizen* of this country fe[els] *content and happy*" ("Vážený" 2; emphasis added). Interestingly, these visions seem to share the rehabilitative investment in the 'assumed prior, assumed normal' (see Striker and McRuer above). The moment of reparation is imagined as the moment when "the ideals of humanism *will again become* the inherent part of the [social] consciousness" ("El Rozhovor" 1-2; emphasis added).

These statements exemplify that post-revolutionary euphoria and positivity are in truth a specific instance of "cruel optimism." Perhaps, indeed, to go beyond Berlant, cruel optimism materializes even more rapidly in locations where capitalism had been least naturalized and thus could be (in the neoliberal era) more readily packaged as a supposed miracle cure for the failures of the past. Such a miracle cure would have you feeling yourself again in no time. Of course, regime change *could have been* a moment for renegotiation of visions of the social, yet these references to an idealised, phantasmatic, 'assumed prior' no-place inhibited (crip) fantasies of different presents and futures. Furthermore, the grammar of rehabilitation is an ethical and moral discourse; curative logic always pairs optimism and euphoria with negative affects and bad feelings.

I want to examine this juxtaposition of promises alongside what I call an "affectivity of debt" to map out how promises were set against demands of overcoming and reparation of the failed, sick, disabled state (of being) of socialism. As darkly ironic as it is, the assuring and optimistic visions of good futures became the ways to curtail utopian visions, critical projects, and critical epistemologies. Petr Pithart said in the early 1990s: "We lived our lives on credit. [...] We have to realise that [...] *so frequently proclaimed 'social securities' and the living standard were secured at great costs*. [...] We lived above our means, on credit and this debt [...] needs to be paid off" (Pithart, "Zpráva" 10; emphasis added). The early 1990s were teeming with similar pronouncements (strangely, or perhaps predictably, similar comments have reappeared with eerie echoes in the present moment of austerity); they carried a notion of 'debt' as the source of negative affects (shame, guilt, abjection) and, most importantly, contained a moral imperative. David Graeber summarises the normative force of the modern idea of debt when he describes its "basic problem" as "the very assumption that debts *have* to be repaid" (Graeber 3).

The need to 'pay off' the debt of failed communism has become instrumental in articulating the moral imperatives that bound every citizen into the collectivity Berlant calls an "affective public," a collectivity knit together both by a shared aspiration to an optimistic future, but also by the shared shame, guilt, and enforced responsibility for the past failure in the project of recuperation *into capitalism*. The statement of the first post-socialist government puts it laconically yet with shrilling clarity: "The *moral recovery* of the nation will not be possible without wise *social policy*" (Pithart "Programové"; emphasis added).

These visions of sociality provide us with one tangible example of a promise transforming itself into a factor that actually inhibits thriving (of the disabled). The project of rehabilitative transition was made synonymous with 'paying off' the debts accumulated by 'living on credit' or 'living above *our* means;' 'social securities' were satirised and put forth as the main source of the crisis. The notion of overextended credit contravened crip visions. The price for social belonging and the symbolic (self-)inclusion into the affective public was, in a cruel paradox, the impossibility of expressing any political demands that would reveal the violence of ableism. The moral weight of the 'affectivity of debt' required that one's critiques and demands be deferred and postponed:

"It is impossible to change everything by a blink of an eye and *even we, the disabled, should be patient*!" (Juřenová 82; emphasis added).
"Do you not believe that this is *not* the most appropriate moment to [...] burden the state budget *further*?" ("Náš mikrorozhovor" n. pag.; emphasis added).

It appears only too convenient – and illustrative of the cruelness of the post-socialist cure – that Klaus's text vindicating a market-based vision of justice,[9] and tellingly entitled "The Chimera of Equality," relies upon a complicated disability metaphor. Employing this metaphor, he likens equality to something "which is hoped for but is *illusory* or *impossible to achieve*" ("Chimera" *OED*; emphasis added). It is not a useless diversion to look up the figurative meanings of the "chimera:"

"(2) a fire-breathing female monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail [...]; (3) an organism containing a mixture of genetically different tissues, formed by processes such as fusion of early embryos, grafting, or mutation [...]; (4) a DNA molecule with sequences derived from two or more different organisms, formed by laboratory manipulation; (5) (chimaera) a cartilaginous marine fish with a long tail, an erect spine before the first dorsal fin, and typically a forward projection from the snout." (ibid.)

9 | See Klaus: "only the market relations will show us who really *deserves* what" ("Chiméra Rovnosti" 1; translation and emphasis by author).

All of these meanings call up visions of abnormality, monstrosity, and bodily difference, all of which are conceptually akin to disability. In fact, the chimera is itself a disability metaphor, a figuration of monstrosity, where references to abnormality and deviation from 'natural order' connote its impossibility. As Michel Foucault elaborates in his lectures on the 'abnormal,' the monster is a *mixture,* either a combination of the human and the animal, a mixture of forms, two species, or two sexes (see Foucault 55-6 and 63). Defying unity and coherence of various sorts, the monster – the chimera – produces confusion that threatens to overthrow the natural order.

By weight of such significations, equality becomes a monstrosity that endangers both social and natural laws and poses a threat to survival and (future) life. Conversely, inequality is legitimised as a natural part and an inevitable consequence of the healthy state/economy and the healthy result of rehabilitative recuperation. The full force of this diatribe against equality and the idea of social solidarity can be seen in the following comparison: "[social welfare is] only at the first sight less dangerous [than] inhuman *communist* and *social nationalist* (sic!) experiments" (Klaus, "Chiméra Rovnosti" 1; emphasis added).

Cripping Cruel Optimism

Echoing Sara Ahmed's understanding of future as "a question [that] unfolds [...] in the present" (*Promise* 164), I want to come back to the questions that have opened this article and to ruminate on what it means to cruise a geopolitical time and place that apparently does not exist anymore. I want to ask what the vantage point crafted from the specific historical experience of socialism and the post-socialist transition offers to critiques of neoliberalism – more specifically, to critiques formulated from cripistemological perspectives and what we might perceive as reorientations towards crip futures.

In engaging with these questions I come back to Berlant's concept of cruel optimism, which has been extremely helpful in my article as I identify structural attachments to promises of better futures that created the ideological base of the project of transition. The engagement with post-socialist material shows, as well, however, that Berlant's brilliant discussion of the toxicity of the neoliberal version of the promise of good life needs, as I implied earlier, to be reformulated not only to correspond to the specificity of the particular experience of post-socialism, but also to reveal how such a confrontation also brings forth more general challenges and lines of critique.

There is a strange incongruity about Lauren Berlant's book; disability is literally on its cover, as the crip artist Riva Lehrer provided the cover image *If Body: Riva and Zora in Middle Age*. It is embedded in the title of the book,

as "cruel optimism" could in fact be a very appropriate naming of the violent, recuperative and compulsory optimism of the cultural logic of rehabilitation to which the disabled are permanently subjected. The book's discussions are haunted by disability; at times disability is even evoked directly, yet it is through the clinical and medicalised language of 'disease,' 'depression,' 'obesity,' 'spina bifida' rather than through the transformative and politicised vocabulary of cripness.

In this sense, Berlant's book replicates the failing of the majority of critical work that exposes the neoliberal debasement of values of solidarity, social justice, and equity. This lack of discussion is startling. Indeed, how is it possible that the bulk of critique of neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality provides such engaging and incisive insights into the politics of maximising vitality, capitalising on the very act of living, or exposing the morbid utilisation of the mechanisms for which Berlant coined the widely circulating term "slow death," and the necropolitical distribution of death, yet does so without including disability/cripness into its analytical instrumentarium? How can a discussion of 'the politics of life' itself do without a category that is integral to modern definition of life and vitality? Taking up the one crip lead from the book, I speak to the image of *If Body* (differently than Berlant herself does in her closing "Note on the Cover Image" 265-267) and ask what would a critique of cruel optimism look like *if* it thought of *crip bodies*, *if* it thought of crip bodies *elsewhere* from the Western context and *if* it thought of *crip existence in the context of post-socialist, neoliberal promises*.[10]

In formulating the crip reading of cruel optimism, in *cripping* cruel optimism, we need to address the different affective structures of post-socialist promises. We also need to read those affective structures along with and perhaps against the relationality of cruel optimism Berlant first identified. Most importantly, the concept needs to be expanded so that its more capacious definition would account for the pressures of compulsory able-bodiedness and for the specific experiences of disabled people and crips. In other words, Berlant's concept of toxic and hurtful promises and her repertoire of critical analysis of fantasies of the good life calls for encounters with crip versions of 'life' as well as for a cripping of the notion of the 'good life.' It needs to be read more carefully and specifically along with the realities of lives that were never promised (let alone lived through) this liberal fantasy, lives that are appropriated

10 | It is beyond the scope of this article to outline the import of the critical interrogations of "post-socialism." However, disability, again, rarely figures in these analyses. The work of scholars such as Anastasia Kayiatos, Sarah Phillips, Darja Zaviršek and the newest anthology edited by Michael Rasell and Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova, to name just a few, represents a valued and important exception to this prevailing trend.

and colonised by images of 'life not worth living,' or lives that are at times not even granted the recognition of life itself.

The transition into neoliberalism produced forms of affective citizenship based on what Berlant calls "aspirational normativity" (164 and 169-71). In the post-socialist context, the aspiration promising the utopia of the 'good life' was not expressed in the imperative to keep going; the moral aspiration of the post-socialist transition was by definition that of rehabilitation, overcoming the failure and shame of the bad past. It was not the "nearly utopian desire of a prolonged present" (163-4), but the "nearly utopian" desire of a recuperative future.

The cruelness of the post-socialist moment lies – as I hope my analysis above unmasks – in conditioning forms of social belonging by an "affectivity of debt," discourses of overcoming, and fantasies of cure. The cultural grammar of rehabilitation saturated 'the political' and 'the social' so fully that claims to social equity could be disavowed and turned into a *chimera*, the crip monstrous ghost haunting the post-socialist redefinition of sociality and community, where any other form of social belonging for crips than under the rubrics of paternalisingly charitable humanism was (and remains) virtually impossible (see Kolářová).

Registering the temporal coincidence of different structures of compulsory optimism also emphasises their cruel irony. The project of rehabilitating the post-socialist crip virtually overlaps with the moment when, in the West, states started to retract their social-welfare commitments. Even more specifically, the countries in 'transition' served to uphold the fantasies of success, health, and the general 'good life' made possible by capitalism. For instance, with the claims that it was living the "post-communist dream" (cited in Weiner 53), the Czech Republic was in the early 1990s (before the myth of smooth, straightforward, and successful transition was ruptured by the first crisis in 1994) put forth as the model for the countries of the former Eastern Block. The "teleology of 'transition'" (Hann 9) of the post-socialist countries along the identical path that the West passed decades earlier (see Verdery) also served, however, as an important projection space for the 'West,' where the apparent rehabilitative capacity of capitalism in the East was utilized to bolster the "secular faith" in (neoliberal) capitalism as the only possibility for human history (Duggan xiii). This did not go completely unnoticed, as the key figure of the Czech transformation, Václav Klaus, himself notes: "It is nearly paradoxical that the speeches of some of us [sic] delivered in the West are perceived not only as signs of the vital renaissance of thought in the East, but are also sought after as a support in their own ideological skirmishes [...]" (Klaus, "Síla" 1). Yet, in his ego-centrism, Klaus did not draw the conclusions at hand: that the project of rehabilitation/transformation in the 'East' and its shock method helped to

sustain the 'West' – and at the same time inhibited the development of a critical crip consciousness in both locations.

Imagining Crip Failures, Crip Horizons

The aspiration of post-socialism was progress, moral emancipation, and eventual happiness. Recall the earlier quote from a letter to the former prime minister of Czechoslovakia that attempted to articulate the vision of the optimistic future as a moment when 'every citizen of this country fe[els] content and happy.' Yet, Sara Ahmed cautions, happiness is a troubled notion. Ahmed asks us: "What are we consenting to, when we consent to happiness?" and offers a troubling answer: "perhaps the consensus that happiness is the consensus" (*Promise* 1). Ahmed's questioning of happiness as the normative horizon of our orientation, resounds with the key issues that I wanted to address; the promise of happiness is a twin of "cruel optimism." Most acutely, Ahmed's critical discussion focuses on revealing how (the vision of and desire for) happiness participates in establishing structures of consensus, which are in fact structures of dominance. With (falsely) positive energy, recuperative logic said, 'you should be happy communism is over;' the promise of happiness was used to justify the oppression of the disabled through ideologies of ableism constitutive to liberal individualism and liberal humanism.

The impossibility of seeing and envisioning crip(topias) in the situation of (post-)shameful identity illustrates not only the harmful and utterly disabling work of certain affective attachments, it also and as vividly illustrates the equally harmful impacts/effects of attachments to affects, in particular attachments to affects of positivity, affects that seemingly are necessary to foster self-embracing identity and subjectivity. In other words, the post-socialist crip challenges Western-developed theories of (disabled) identity that argue that positive affects are necessary to foster self-embracing and affirmative understandings of disability and disabled subjectivity. The symbolic violence embedded in recuperative positivity offers us the opportunity to think about crip failure and crip negativity. The violence also points toward conditions that (could) make (some forms of) failure useful for cripistemologies and that (could) map crip horizons.

Cripness *is* already rich with failure; cripness *is* infused with negativity that sustains. The crip negativity I plead for is a critical strategy rupturing ideologies of cure, rehabilitation and overcoming, ideologies that inflict hurt and violence (not only) on crips. I wish to initiate a discussion about crip negativity as a political practice working towards (if never reaching) crip utopian horizons. Still, the post-socialist crip opens other and new questions about what crip failure would mean if it were to foster and sustain life, what forms of crip

negative energies would allow for crip utopias and make possible the desire for crip survival.

J. Jack Halberstam's theory of failure elucidates how the compulsory positive nature of optimism, hope, pride, and success precludes the realisation that failure can be a form of sustenance and strategy of critique/survival. In failing the normative prescriptions of compulsory heterosexuality (and ablebodiedness), failure "imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being" (Halberstam 88). And coming back to the image of the women failing/surviving with AIDS at the post-socialist Odessa hospice, failure also imagines signs of crip solidarity and sustenance where the visions of an optimistic future create spaces of abandonment for subjects who will never be offered a fantasy of the 'good life.'

Despite its lack of substantial attention to cripness that would surpass the level of metaphorics, Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* does offer some lines along which to also think *crip* failures. The most helpful to my current analysis of post-socialist affects would seem to be Halberstam's discussion of the failure to remember. Forgetting, losing, looping between past and future are the techniques of resistance to normative temporalities.

Such failures at temporalities of progressive and curative futurity, I argue, could offer forms of sustenance (for the post-socialist crip). The failure to remember would produce a rupture into the dominant narratives of shame (of a failed socialism) and the futurity of 'getting better.' It would forget visions of pride based on overcoming the failed socialist crip, and it would loosen/lose the compulsory vision of optimism of (neoliberal) humanism. It would forget the ideologies that we have seen to hurt and violate crips and our futures. Cripping, disjointing the normative forms of (linear) knowing about the past-present-future, could offer resistance to the cruel hope that directs our desires into (an evacuated) future, while foreclosing the negotiation of difficult yet important relationships past and the present.

The rejection of the curative and always already deferred future opens up a space for developing a more complicated relationship with failed pasts. Queer theorist Heather Love devises the politics of 'feeling backwards/backwards feelings' as an affective strategy of resistance to liberal understandings of the repressive hypothesis and emancipation (see Love). Her concept is both a corrective to the deeply problematic progressivism of 'gay pragmatism' with its compulsorily positive futurity of 'getting better', as well as an affective reaching backwards to legacies of difficult pasts. As she puts it, "[b]ackward feelings serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad gay past and the present; and they show up the inadequacy of queer narratives of progress" (Love 27); I wish to add, they show up continuities between crip pasts and presents obscured by the undisputedly "good intentions" of rehabilitation (McRuer, *Crip* 110). Halberstam for his

part appreciates the strategies of backward feeling as a way of recovering the past of queer and racially marked subjects erased in the tidy versions of the past, "[w]hile liberal histories build triumphant political narratives with progressive stories of improvement and success, radical histories must content with a less tidy past, one that passes on legacies of failure and loneliness as the consequence of [ableist] homophobia and racism and xenophobia" (Halberstam 98). To retrieve lives undone by ideologies of ableism, homophobia, racism and xenophobia, and practices of institutionalisation, forced sterilisation, ethnic segregation, and on and on, we need backward-feelings.

The project of "reformulated histories" (see Kafer's discussion of Halberstam 42-44) feels backwards to past forms of *crip survivals* and past experiences that have been erased. Alongside this move, I also want to 'feel backwards' to the hurt caused by the shame of the bad past itself. This is not a naïve reclamation of the idealised communist past ignorant of the violence committed by the communist regime (violence and hurt inflicted on disabled people still remains mostly undocumented, unspoken, and unanalysed). What I argue is that the notion of the bad and failed past is too comfortable and too tidy and serves only the ideology of capitalist recovery that prescribes only one version of futurity, a futurity – I argue – that is constructed upon abjection of cripness. To open critical discussion I propose that we need to continue to produce untidy, crooked, queer, twisted, bent, crip versions of pasts. Only they will provide for more generous horizons of the present and future.

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Responses to Kateřina Kolářová

Heidi Helmhold

Cruel Optimism, Crip Epistemology, and the Limits of Visual Analysis

Kateřina Kolářová's essay, "The Inarticulate Post-Socialist Crip," provides an interesting and terminologically dense reading. Overlaps with topics of my own research[11] covering visual arts, material culture, affect politics and space arise particularly in relation to terms such as 'structure of feeling,' 'affective attachments,' as well as the image-text relation in the context of visual arts. In the following, I will present three responses to this text. First, with reference to Laurent Berlant's terminology of 'cruel optimism,' as cited by Kolářová, I will present an argumentation differing from the one she follows. According to my understanding, no 'toxic attachment' to the cultural and contextual contingencies of the 'inarticulate crip' as described by Kolářová can be derived from Berlant's 'cruel optimism.' The second response refers to the neoliberal transformation processes in post-socialist Czechoslovakia, which Kolářová regards as responsible for the prevention of a crip epistemology. I believe, instead, that the university is accountable for such transformation processes, since academia should be understood as a place where epistemologies are included and excluded, hence it is also responsible for the formation of precarities. Third, my response deals with Kolářová's interpretation of Jan Šibík's photo "Chci ještě žít" from the series "Každý desátý! – Ukrajina, Oděsa, 2003-2004." Here I wish to defend the right of an artistic achievement in professional art (and the work in question is professional photo art) to be protected against misreading for the sake of supporting one's own argumentation.

11 | See Heidi Helmhold, *Affektpolitik und Raum* (especially 9-33).

First Response: Cruel Optimism Describes Positive Processes

In Kolářová's line of argumentation, Berlant's term 'cruel optimism' is considered as a concept that is supposed to identify the strategic dynamics of post-socialist transformation processes and fundamentally to depict these in their cruelty. However, in terms of her own definition, Berlant's 'affective attachments' are only construed with reference to what she calls 'the good life,' which is unattainable for so many, but – and this perspective is decisive – still holds potential that principally offers everyone the opportunity to participate in it:

> "As an analytic lever, it is an incitement to inhabit and to track the affective attachment to what we call 'the good life', which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it. [...] Cruel optimism is in this sense a concept pointing toward a mode of lived immanence, one that grows from a perception about the reasons people [...] choose to ride the wave of the system of attachment that they are used to, to syncopate with it, or to be held in a relation of reciprocity, reconciliation, or resignation that does not mean defeat by it." (Berlant 27-28)

Attachment as a 'structure of relationality' is linked to a wide range of experiences taking into consideration affects and emotions, so that Berlant concludes: "I therefore make no claims about what specific experiential modes of emotional reflexivity, if any, are especially queer, cool, resistant, revolutionary, or not" (13).

In order to dissociate from Berlant's notion of affective attachment, Kolářová establishes the category of "toxic attachment (232)," whereby cripness should become an "impossible location." (233) From my point of view, it does not really make sense to introduce this term. On the one hand, Kolářová convincingly illustrates that there exists a dis/ability semantics in the process of post-socialist transformation. But this does not explain that a crip epistemology was in actual fact *prevented* by this dis/ability semantic. Kolářová neither provides specific, empirical details nor does she present a direct addressee or an historical sphere of activity for this prevention. On the other hand, the term 'cruel optimism' seems to me fundamentally unsuitable in this context. According to my understanding, Berlant is interested in positive processes of change within neoliberal conditions. As cited above, "[c]ruel optimism is in this sense a concept pointing toward a mode of lived immanence" (Berlant 28), which means that cruel optimism ultimately aims to overcome the impasses. If this assumption of a positive dynamic intrinsic in the system is followed, then this constitutes a condition precedent that leads to the articulation of a language proper to 'crip expression' and definitely not to an 'inarticulate crip.' Rather,

this inarticulate crip exists, precisely in the sense of Berlant, in "a relation of reciprocity, reconciliation, or resignation that does not mean defeat by it" (28).

In other words, a counter-culture can result in 'guerilla techniques.' The impact and power of these techniques should not be underestimated; intrinsically they hold a great potential for articulation. Berlant describes such guerilla activity with the example of "The Surveillance Camera Players," "a comic project with a DIY aesthetic, inspired by underground or guerilla activity" (Berlant 240). She relates how the group's book, *We Are Watching You* [2001], "provides rich documentation of their tactical, ephemeral, spectatorial events," events which involve actors confronting public surveillance cameras with cardboard signs displaying humorous messages that exemplify the "enactment of the body politic's refusal to be docile" (ibid.). "This aesthetic project," Berlant maintains, "reconstructs the body politic as an institutional actor who addresses the state as an interlocutor, not a structure, and whose pleasure is not in an unconscious or random freedom but in the production of interference, noise in the system" (242).

Second Response: Neoliberalism, University and the 'Inarticulate Crip'

My next response discusses neoliberal transformation processes with reference to academia. Such processes, which Kolářová reflects on with respect to post-socialist Czechoslovakia, have now become global instruments. They have also reached institutions of knowledge, in particular universities, and have resulted in the official restructuring of knowledge itself within these institutions. Again, I am drawing on Berlant:

> "Speaking of cruel optimism, it may be that, for many now, living in an impasse would be an aspiration, as the traditional infrastructures for reproducing life – at work, in intimacy, politically – are crumbling at a threatening pace. [...] What Jacques Rancière calls 'the distribution of the sensible' appears here not only in the class-based positioning of sensibility, but also in gestural economies that register norms of self-management that differ according to what kinds of confidence people have enjoyed about the entitlement of their social location. The way the body slows down what's going down helps to clarify the relation of living on to ongoing crisis and loss." (Berlant 4-5)

In this sense, I cannot follow Kolářová and her highlighting of cruel optimism as the agent of the prevention of a crip epistemology in post-socialist Czechoslovakia, because I understand cruel optimism as containing a rather positive, modifying dynamic. For me, the more relevant term – and Berlant also emphasizes this – would be precarity. Neoliberal transformation processes are immanently precarity-forming processes, which describe a global process

and consequently a process relevant to society and social inequality as a whole. In Berlant's words: "At root, precarity is a condition of dependency – as a legal term, *precarious* describes the situation wherein your tenancy on your land is in someone else's hand" (192). Precarity designates managing systems which govern resources and capital, and which continually decrease temporal and spatial units of work and social participation. This process undermines and prohibits the formation of certain epistemic systems if they do not fit into the neoliberal administrative system of knowledge.

In the following, I aim to trace this dynamic by discussing the example of German academia in order to indicate how knowledge machines based upon neoliberal patterns function. Further, I will relate this discussion to Kolářová's assertions related to the 'inarticulate crip' and its connection to the neoliberalization of the university. Since the 1980s, the reorganization of 'university' as a place of knowledge and education has been conducted in Germany with a clear tendency towards a focus on achievement, following the motto 'strong academia results in strong achievement.' But how can strong achievements be established? In Germany, academic achievement is increasingly assessed according to quantifiable criteria that can be visualized in external and internal rankings and subsequently converted into financial and other forms of capital.

To implement neoliberal policies in academia, in its 1993 "10 Hypotheses On Higher Education Policies," the German Council of Science and Humanities suggested a stronger orientation towards employment and vocation as well as an alignment with the requirements of the economy, such as permanent evaluation, adherence to standard periods of study, and other measures (see "10 Hypotheses"). The tenth hypothesis demanded autonomous (i.e., non-state) institutions of higher education which are capable of acting on their own account; their destiny was to be placed in the hands of a "higher education institution management capable of making decisions" (ibid.; translation by author). The effectiveness of this neoliberal 'university' is reflected in particular in the raising of external funds: If individual faculties and departments are successful, they can gain external funding bonuses, which will enable them to engage in internal monetary allocations according to the principle of 'achievement-oriented allocation of funds.'[12] Thus, neoliberal university management relies on the measurement of achievement, which is published in university rankings – similar to the premier league rankings – in economic journals. The criteria for these rankings are devised in accordance with standards of quantifiable measurability. In these rankings, students are referred to as 'customers,' a terminology that has symptomatically been coined in the neoliberal higher education transformation process itself.

12 | In German: Leistungsorientierte Mittelzuweisung (LOMZ).

In the context of the Bologna Process starting in 1999, a further instrument of neoliberalising academia in Europe and therefore also in Germany has been developed: the two-tier BA/MA program structure, which aims at inter-European comparability of university degrees. Since then, the formats of university courses have been centrally predefined. To be established, a course needs to pass an accreditation process, which is controlled by private agencies. These accreditation agencies are appointed by a national accreditation council which, by way of a statutory mandate, monitors whether university courses consist of a corset of a specific length, examination performance and workload for students; output orientation plays an important role in this respect.

Last but not least, in 2005/06 Germany developed the "Excellence Initiative" instrument: An elite of top universities was created and endowed with an increased volume of equipment and financing. Professors who carry out research in these elite clusters are exempted from teaching, while teaching is conducted by highly qualified, massively underpaid academics who are employed through precarious employment contracts. This formation of an 'elite' through the 'Excellence Initiative' has had exclusionary effects on the academic community as a whole: It outshines the rest of the faculty which now appears as underachieving and unattractive. Academics, who are not affiliated with the neoliberal formation of achievement, visibility (affective public), university ministration (curative positivity), excellence, and scientific potency (i.e. funds and personnel equipment) stay behind and do not face an optimistic future. Their forms of knowledge fall by the wayside in the prevailing mentality of quantifiable scientific achievement, orientation towards employability, and standardization of studies, or, to assimilate Kolářová's terminology: They remain 'inarticulate.'

Thus, remaining inarticulate does not only apply to traditionally 'minor subjects' such as crip theory, but it concerns any epistemology which fails to find a place in neoliberal academia or cannot even be taught. This invisibility can *also* refer to 'crip epistemology,' but in my view, processes of suppressing 'other' forms of knowledge should be considered from the perspective of the neoliberal university system, rather than attributing it to 'crip epistemology' itself. Contrasting planned economy and market economy, as Kolářová (236) does in line with Elaine Weiner, does not, in my opinion, provide specific indicators for 'the inarticulate post-socialist crip'. Instead, it would have been interesting to be offered an analysis of *university* disability semantics during the period of transition in post-socialist Czechoslovakia.

Third Response: Social Creativity, Beauty, Visual Culture

My last response deals with the work of Jan Šibík, who I know as an internationally active photographer who intervenes in political and social contexts while applying professional methods, creating good and profound artistic work. In her essay, Kolářová discusses a photograph by Šibík called "Chci ještě žít" or "I Want to Live" from a series of photographs supporting people suffering from AIDS in Odessa, Ukraine, which Šibík photographed in the early 2000s. The series comprises 19 photographs, which are currently on view on Šibík's website under the title "Každý desátý! – Ukrajina, Oděsa, 2003-2004." The images document various spatial situations in an asylum for AIDS-infected people in Odessa, "where people with AIDS were left to themselves; those who still could cared for those closer to death" (Kolářová 234). Disparately placed beds, tables and chairs on which sick people sit, lie, and sleep are depicted. The images show visitors sitting on beds together with residents and in one photograph also with a priest, who, unnoticed by the people in the room, seems to be reading a mass. They also show several people sleeping, being self-absorbed, or looking unemotionally into the camera. The pictures show roommates looking at people in the bed next to them or seemingly thinking about them. They show a nurse turning to a woman who is lying on a bed naked waiting to be taken care of. They show women talking or exchanging caring gestures. They show a deceased man being mourned by his wife. And they show another deceased man who, adorned with flowers, is publicly carried on the street, and people in the background, who are probably his relatives – although no specific mourning clothes can be seen here. In these photographs people's gestures are introverted, partly focusing on conversation, partly with long lingering gazes. Many of these photographs show physical contact – visitors touching patients who are lying on beds, a nurse touching another bed-ridden woman, patients touching each other, or people being engrossed in thought while touching themselves. Almost all of the photos depict instances of social interaction – humans, rooms and objects appear as *spacing* (see Löw 108-115, 158-161). There is one specific photograph that does not show a social interaction but a body segment: On a bed sheet we discern human legs 'bandaged' with plastic bags. The legs are marked by wounds, some of which are bleeding. Bloodstains can be seen on the bed.[13]

Kolářová chose image number 7 as an example of the inarticulate crip. Two women in their underwear sit facing each other, one of them on the bed, the other one on the floor in front it. The woman sitting on the bed carries out a

13 | See Photograph 12 on Jan Šibík's website: <http://www.sibik.cz/reportaze/aids_odesa_ukrajina/index.html>.

nursing or cosmetic gesture on the woman sitting beneath her – a focused gesture of care that is received by the woman sitting below with equal attention. Kolářová describes this scene as follows: "The drab environment, the pills, used cups, and fashion magazines surrounding the women tell a story of sickness and an improvised/impoverished home. However, the women are so engrossed in each other that the markers of illness, death, and destitution seem to disappear in a momentous bliss of erotic and mutual care" (Kolářová 233-234). Put into context with the other photographs of the series, this description itself is a projection. Indeed, many of these photos show a "drab environment" that fits the description of "pills, used cups, and fashion magazines [that] tell a story of sickness and an improvised/impoverished home" (233). But this photo in particular *does not* show a story of sickness with regard to its tangible, spatial setting. In my reading, it is an attentive and intimate scene between two women who are engrossed in physical affection. The surrounding space is densely equipped and could therefore also be a small room in a residence hall – insignia of sickness and hopelessness are spatially eliminated if one compares it with the other photographs. And crucially: In contrast to Kolářová, I contend that the affection shared by these women is *not* of an erotic nature, at least not in an intentional sense. The gestures between the two women are full of trust and tenderness, which corresponds with the seemingly mutual affection between them. To speak of a 'momentous bliss of erotic and mutual care,' as Kolářová does, projects, from my point of view, a (male or eroticized) gaze onto an intimate situation of devotion.

Moreover, with this interpretation Kolářová underestimates the narrative dimension of the entire series. I understand this photo as the most 'touching' photograph of the series – touching in a double sense: touching the beholder by means of the devotion between the two women and touching as an act of mutual physical contact. There is no visual reference to sickness, death or destruction in this image. It is – in all of the fragility of the place, the asylum, in all of the hopelessness of the situation – the most socially creative photograph in the series. Furthermore, it is significant that this social creativity is iconically carried out by two women, in contrast with the iconic hopelessness of individual men in other photographs of the series (see for example image number 4 on Šibík's website). Against this background I cannot comprehend why this photograph should show "a powerful clash between failure and sustenance," as Kolářová puts it (234). She sees the two women depicted here as embodying the failure of the ideologies of vitality and able-bodied health. And she goes on to say that the image

"attaches the woman's bodies to each other by acts of interdependent care, while their ambivalent positioning allows – even calls for and invites – sexual fantasies, turning the

two women into subjects of (each other's) desire. In this they paradoxically embody a moment of careless sorority and of mutual care/pleasure." (Ibid.)

But there is no pictorial evidence to suggest a sexual phantasy constructed between the two women and/or which would evoke sexual phantasy in the viewer. Additionally, I cannot *see* that this photograph shows "[t]he ways in which the 'failure' of AIDS/illness can be turned into sustaining cripness," as Kolářová argues (ibid.). Since Susan Sontag we have known of the subtle but effective instruments which the photography of Postmodernism has introduced into photographic narratives:

"But notwithstanding the declared aims of indiscreet, unposed, often harsh photography to reveal truth, not beauty, photography still beautifies. Indeed, the most enduring triumph of photography has been its aptitude for discovering beauty in the humble, the inane, the decrepit. At the very least, the real has a pathos. And that pathos is – beauty" (Sontag 102).

With this ability of visual culture to 'beautify' the ugly, an implicit vehemence and horror is often amplified rather than taken away. But pathos occurs in the sense of affectivity and emotionality. However, there is one particular thing that is not accomplished in works such Jan Šibík's (and works of visual art in general): They do not allow themselves to be instrumentalized. This photo, like the others in the series, is undoubtedly a statement about a time of political and moral re-orientation in East Europe, in particular in the Ukraine. But its iconic program has its own hermeticism which can illustrate a theoretical or cultural context only to a limited extent: "But photographs do not explain; they acknowledge. Robert Frank was only being honest when he declared that 'to produce an authentic contemporary document, the visual impact should be such as will nullify explanation'" (Sontag 111).

If this photo and some others in the series show something *in the image*, then they show gestures of affection in a hopeless environment (asylum, society, political re-organization). What they do not display is 'failure' or 'ambivalence' – there are definitely no signs and no iconographic program which would indicate these aspects in this particular photograph. In Šibík's photographs, the subject matter is the same as in all narrative images in critical documentary photography, namely humanity and the lack thereof. This is a lot and should not be underestimated; it has the potential to shape our views about political and social injustices. In this regard, the photo itself appears as a "dissociative point of intersection," as Susan Sontag (97) describes it, between the camera and the human eye, and it is therefore never congruent with what is generally

called 'reality' or 'truth.'[14] Consequently, we cannot derive a valid structure of a pictorial *crip signing* from the majority of the photos in this series by Jan Šibík. Kolářová's attempt to see this in his visual artwork appears inexplicable to me.

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14 | Also see: "Photographic seeing, when one examines its claims, turns out to be mainly the practice of a kind of dissociative seeing, a subject habit which is reinforced by the objective discrepancies between the way that the camera and the human eye focus and judge perspective" (Sontag 97).

Arne Müller

Crip Horizons, the Cultural Model of Disability, and Bourdieu's Political Sociology

While reading Kateřina Kolářová's essay for the first time and coming across what she names 'crip horizons,' I was reminded of the cultural model of disability developed by researchers like Anne Waldschmidt (2005) and Patrick Devlieger (2005) in Europe, or Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell (2006) in North America. The implementation of this model is intended to initiate a paradigm shift: By offering a different research perspective it shifts the analytical frame away from individualistic or socio-political aspects of impairment and disability towards the cultural norms of the temporally able-bodied majority. The cultural model presents an alternative model of disability, as it focuses on the cultural practices and normative grounds that are responsible for the marginalization of disabled persons[15] within a given society. In the social model of disability, exclusion results from social behaviors (like discrimination) and insurmountable barriers (like inaccessible buildings), whereas the cultural model focuses on cultural patterns that are causing exclusion by defining what is considered normal for a culture or, as Devlieger states, "disability is a symbolic reflection of dominant categories in society, a mirror" (Devlieger 9). According to this model, disability is a foil that is used to divide normalcy from deviation. So from my point of view, the main function of the cultural model is to analyze in which ways considering people as disabled contributes to the discourse of normalcy within a society.

In this response I want to concentrate on three different aspects. First, I would like to discuss how Kolářová's remarks about the rehabilitative rhetoric of the Czech transition period provide vivid examples of what is addressed by the cultural model of disability. Then, I will concentrate on the sociological ramifications of considering disabled persons as a specific social group, and I will try to show that the theoretical approach of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is helpful in understanding disabled or 'crip' resistance to neoliberalism. Finally, I discuss implications for the research of social inequality and inclusion with particular regard to disability.

Although Kolářová does not explicitly refer to the cultural model of disability, her essay can be read as a contribution to this approach. Unfortunately, she does not provide a definition of the term 'crip horizons,' but refers instead to political horizons which, following Deborah B. Gould, she considers as a state that is

15 | In this essay the term 'disabled persons' is used instead of persons (or people) with disabilities. According to Barnes (20), the term 'people with disabilities' focuses on disability in the sense of impairment and thus denies or neglects that these persons are actually more disabled by the societies they live in than by their impairments.

imagined as "possible, desirable and necessary" (Kolářová 232). Assuming that this definition applies to 'crip horizons' as well, such a desired horizon appears to be opposed to current concepts of normalcy that are normative in so far as "disabled people serve the nondisabled to define themselves as normal" (Devlieger 9). This is the point where the cultural model of disability comes into play.

By starting with normative structures of a society that considers some of its members as deviant and provides rehabilitative solutions for them, one can analyze both the concept and the treatment of disability within this society. In a time of the worldwide ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it would appear that the inclusion of disabled people has become a judicially codified cultural norm. However, despite the Convention the exclusion of disabled persons is still a common everyday practice. In most countries academic discourses and public speeches continue to use a rehabilitative rhetoric which disabled people find offensive, as the will to rehabilitate implies that one also needs to eliminate the pathological parts.

This last point is addressed by Kolářová, and in this respect one of her main aims is to examine this rehabilitative rhetoric as part of the dominant narratives in the Czech Republic during its post-socialist transition period. By doing so, she addresses the normative complex of disability at that time. By showing that the 'affective attachments' (Kolářová 232) which underlay the country's transitional period were influenced by promises of hope and cure even for disabled people, Kolářová provides vivid examples of strategies of exclusion during this shift to capitalism and neoliberalism. Demands of disabled persons were not fulfilled but rather postponed, accompanied by what Kolářová calls in reference to Laurent Berlant "cruel optimism" for better futures. To promise these better futures, the narratives of the Czech post-socialistic transition period used a vocabulary of rehabilitation, cure, and recuperation.

Taking the cultural model of disability and using it to analyze the post-socialist transition period in Eastern Europe can, as Kolářová's essay shows, be helpful in highlighting the idea that the normative grounds in the 1990s were largely based on medical implications and the promise for better futures without 'crippled deviance'. Such futures could be considered as proud, bright, and tempting for those who wanted to escape the communist past that was no longer considered as a model opposed to a glorified capitalism. To emphasize this deviation between 'evil' communism and 'good' capitalism in the time of the transition period, Elaine Weiner's table (see Kolářová 236) is a useful tool that illustrates how the deliberate use of a certain diction contributed indirectly to the exclusion of disabled people. The good capitalist future is regarded as the 'normal' result of hard, able-bodied work, and will allow no room for those considered 'abnormal' and who do not contribute on an equal footing because they live with impairments.

In the second part of my response, I will concentrate on some aspects of social structure analysis that seem pertinent to Kolářová's intervention. As she uses the term 'cripness' throughout her article and refers to the 'disabled,' she seems to address disabled persons as a social group that could be regarded according to Bourdieu as an "objective class" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 570 et. seq.).

In such an "objective class" all members of a group are imagined as socially close because they share the same experiences, live similar lives or, as Bourdieu would say, they share a "class habitus" (101). But, in my point of view, disabled people do not share the same habitus just because they have impairments. I would rather argue that they share a habitus only when they have the same social class which is based on similar economic, cultural and social resources or forms of capital, but not a result of the same impairment experiences. This differentiation is of importance where agent-based questions are concerned, especially when disabled people turn out to be a "mobilized class" (570). Following Bourdieu, such a mobilized class is "a set of individuals brought together [...] for the purpose of the struggle to preserve or modify the structure of the distribution of objectified properties" (ibid.). For reasons of fighting for a shared goal this mobilized class might function for a short span of time, but having Bourdieu's theory in mind implies that the habitus of different members of the imagined mobilized class of disabled people might differ due to the different class backgrounds of its members which thus will challenge the coherence of common aims in the long term.

According to Kolářová, disabled people in the Czech Republic's post-socialist transition period considered themselves to be part of the new capitalist society, but were confronted with a request for patience and, finally, the postponement of their demands (see Kolářová 239). To me it appears like a trade-off to sacrifice one's own demands as a mobilized class for the sake of being an inclusive and equal part of a better future. It seems even more astonishing that disabled people in the Czech Republic postponed their demands when the analysed rhetoric of that time used a disability-adverse and excluding language.

Within the framework of Bourdieu and his critique of neoliberalism, one could argue that people who postpone their demands opt, at least in the midterm, for a strong "right hand of the state" (Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance* 2), although they are in need of what he calls "the left hand of the state" (ibid.). This left hand symbolises the traces "of the social struggles of the past" (ibid.), such as social security systems, social work, etc., which might be considered cost-intensive areas of a state's budget from a neoliberalist point of view. The right hand of the state includes, among others, "the technocrats of the Ministry of Finance" (ibid.) who focus on reducing state expenses. In other words, according to Bourdieu neoliberal strategies aim to eliminate 'cost factors' like the results of past social struggles and encourage individual achievement and competition

instead. Thus, the social structure of neoliberal societies is presented as the result of individual merit and what Bourdieu calls "neo-Darwinism [...] the product of the natural selection of the most capable" (Bourdieu, *Firing Back* 34). As disabled persons are often regarded as less capable of contributing merits they face new inequalities in neoliberal economies and their situation turns out to be precarious. In my opinion, neoliberal politics focusing on individual effort does not offer promises for disabled persons at all; the mobilized class of disabled persons should rather concentrate on engaging more strongly in new social movements by engaging in acts of resistance against neoliberalism and austerity measures.

These short remarks with reference to Bourdieu and his approach to neoliberalism introduce another pressing issue. Discourses about disabled persons often start from the assumption that they own a social status of deprivation or poverty, i.e. the reflection of disabled people's life situations usually implies talking about class issues. But this aspect is seldom explicitly mentioned. In this respect, Kolářová's essay is just one striking example among many others. She never ever uses the term 'class,' but is in fact focusing on precisely this point.

So why is class so important in this context? I would argue that failing to address disabled persons' problems as class issues is another mode of a politics of exclusion which makes it easier to ignore or postpone the demands of the group of disabled persons. To better discuss this point it might be useful to have a closer look into today's concepts of inequality.

Current research on social inequality distinguishes between so-called vertical and horizontal inequalities (see Stewart et al.). It considers individual inequality, such as income and wealth or knowledge, as vertical inequality and differentiates these individual attributes from those that are considered as collective because they refer to attributes not considered to be a result of individual achievement. These collective attributes are designated as horizontal inequalities, for example gender, ethnicity, or disability (ibid.). For analytical purposes, the distinction between vertical and horizontal inequality has some enlightening implications for my context. As already mentioned, from a non-disabled perspective disabled people are considered as less able to contribute merits that serve to secure a reasonable living. In addition, current research for Germany shows that provisions of social security such as legal protections against dismissal on the labor market often hinder the hiring of disabled persons at all (see Niehaus and Bauer). Ascribed restrictions of the productivity of impaired people and the reverse effect of dismissal protections have a strong disabling effect for the entire social group. Addressing the social group of disabled people as a collective with shared disabling experiences (i.e., addressing them only as horizontally unequal) results, in my point of view, only

in obscuring the vertical dimension, or what I would call the "vertical effect" of a horizontal inequality like disability.

With this argument I do not want to suggest that all disabled people are always excluded or poor, but I would rather like to call for the necessity of research into social inequality concerning disabled people that broadens its analytical framework and analyzes the functional interactions between vertical and horizontal inequalities. As I have already pointed out, considering a person as horizontally unequal does not necessarily mean that this person is poor or a member of an inferior class, but sociological research should aim at identifying to which extent one's vertical position is (also) caused by horizontal effects. Additionally, there might be other reverse effects. Being a member of the dominant class or having access to a good living can diminish or soften horizontal, i.e. disabling, experiences.

Currently, there is a lot of research analyzing these functional interactions of different inequalities under the rubric of what is called 'intersectionality' (see Hess et al.). The concept of intersectionality may be well-suited to the analysis of disability-related inequalities and systematic oppression, especially when horizontal and vertical inequalities intersect. But general intersectional analyses still tend to ignore disability and prefer to focus on other categories such as race, class, and gender. Future disability research should take the approach of analyzing marginalization and promote the inclusion of disability as an important inequality in intersectional analyses.

Referring to Kolářová's essay, using the cultural model of disability as a background, and drawing on Bourdieu's political sociology, this essay has tried to elaborate the argument that the culturalist concept of 'crip horizons' is helpful, but it should be supplemented by a broader analytical framework considering class theory, social inequality approaches, and intersectionality. What is needed is a figure of thought capable of challenging cultural norms and of irritating established concepts of normalcy. In so doing, the potential to establish 'crip existence' as a new mode of existence is likely to arise.

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