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Intimacy as Crip-Queer Interdependence in *The Dan Daw Show* (2021)

ABSTRACT

Based on an analysis of the Crip-queer BDSM performance *The Dan Daw Show*, this article shows how intimacy is constituted (1) as an orientation towards each other and (2) by means of actions such as consensual practices. In the performance, intimacy manifests itself not only between the two performers but also between the performers and the audience. Thus, a tangible or felt interdependent network is created in which a corresponding, relational understanding of the subject is embedded—which in turn entails ethical implications. An alternative world is imagined on stage, which is mirrored in the care measures of the larger performance setting in the form of trigger warnings.

Keywords: performance, BDSM, interdependence, consent, trigger warning, care ethics.

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In hegemonic and heteronormative European discourse, intimacy is framed as a *private matter* and therefore excluded from a supposedly delineated public sphere, as well as narrowly defined as an exclusively heterosexual and/or romantic closeness (Dankwa 22-21). Thus, the constitution of intimacy seems impossible in a public context such as a theatrical performance which divides the participants into performers and spectators and, in doing so, always creates an audience. The Crip-queer theatre performance *The Dan Daw Show* (2021), however, makes a critical and transformative reference to the dominant discourse on intimacy. It shows how intimacy among performers and between performers and audiences can be constructed and thus made tangible as a spectrum.

The Dan Daw Show is a theatrical stage performance that uses a queer BDSM setting to address issues of interdependence (Tronto 131–32, 162–64; Butler, *Force of Nonviolence* 15–18, 35, 37–48), dependency, intimacy, pleasure, needs, (physical) boundaries, care, and Crip-queer joy. The queer and disabled performer Dan Daw takes on the role of the sub, while the able-bodied performer Krisx assumes the dominant role. This explicit artificial setting of their (power) relationship structures the dynamics of movement and touch in the performance. The unequal, yet controlled power dynamics are repeatedly shown as iterative and constantly evolving (Schiel 214–16), thereby constituting intimacy. In my analysis, I will start from a performative understanding of emotions, following Sara Ahmed. Instead of conceptualizing emotions as something internal or external, Ahmed thinks of them as practices that give shape to bodily surfaces as such in the first place (*Cultural Politics of Emotion* 1, 4). She conceives of emotions as circulating forces that align us with certain objects (45).

In this article, I will elaborate on how intimacy in *The Dan Daw Show* can be analyzed as a queer-phenomenological "orientation" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1), as an alignment of the performers and the audience towards each other. Then, I will show how the performance engages in practices of consent as a way of creating and revealing intimacy in relation to an always interdependent world from which ethical demands are derived. Those are also incorporated into the broader performance context in the form of trigger warnings. Drawing on these key aspects of the performance, this article will illustrate how the show engages critically with normative and exclusionary understandings of intimacy, sexuality, consent, and well-being, thereby "cripping" and "queering" (Sandahl *passim*; Kreuser 83–89) these notions and articulating an alternative grasp on autonomy, responsibility, and interdependency.

CRIP-QUEER INTIMACY AS MUTUAL VULNERABILITY

"For those of you not used to seeing a 38-year-old Crip in their power, I've got ya'." With this line at the start of the performance, the performer Dan references the still poor representation of queer disabled bodies on theatre and dance stages, and the continuing tendency to portray Crip-queer bodies primarily in terms of their suffering or as an inspiration for resilience (Kreuser 14, 78–81). With this statement, he already hints that the following performance rejects these narratives. The compound of the politically re-appropriated, formerly pejorative terms Crip and queer marks their intersectional entanglement (McRuer 40–41) in the performance.

The Dan Daw Show constructs Crip-queer intimacy not only between the two performers, but also between them and the spectators, thus creating a multi-layered, relational network that is experienced emotionally and felt by the audience. This intimate atmosphere is created through various practices which not only undermine hegemonic notions of intimacy, but also exemplify alternative, more caring relationships between bodies whose sexuality is systematically denied in a heteronormative and ableist discourse (Kreuser 121; Oeming 9–10; Tellier 485). The performance impressively demonstrates how feelings of vulnerability, sexiness, closeness, and connectedness are produced through certain actions, and thus encompasses a broad spectrum of intimacy. Mutual dependencies and vulnerabilities are re-interpreted in a Crip-queer understanding, and in doing so, re-framed as desirable (Hall 413–14).

According to Lauren Berlant, intimacy can be understood as a permanent process which can be either successful or unsuccessful and can either stabilize or subvert hegemonic structures. Intimacy is thus not a fixed pre-existing relationship between supposedly separate subjects but must constantly be created, reproduced, and negotiated between its participants (Berlant 282). Therein, the fundamental vulnerability of bodies becomes evident as a human condition which is structured through different hierarchized and hierarchizing categories (Butler, *Force of Nonviolence* 45–47): when bodies are understood and recognized as inherently vulnerable, the necessity for mutual care and responsibility, as well as the need for reflection on our intimate relationships and their constant recalibration becomes evident. This tension is negotiated in *The Dan Daw Show*, in which the constitutive processes and conditions for a caring yet sexy relationship are repeatedly revealed. This happens first and foremost in the context of the performed BDSM relationship between Dan and Krisx. A stereotypical BDSM-procedure structures and guides the larger dramaturgy of the evening: the performance begins formally

with thorough information on BDSM and consent, then switches to the hierarchized play as the main part of the piece, and ends with aftercare, a ritual in which the different power positions are consciously abandoned again and togetherness and connection on an equal level are practised in a caring and soft manner.[1]

BDSM functions as a very broad "self-description" (Schiel 205, translation mine) of the community for diverse practices of "Bondage, Discipline, Domination and Submission" (205). Its representatives distance themselves from a "one-dimensional reading of sexuality" (209, translation mine) and subvert the (hetero)normative fixation on genitalia, celebrating a much wider spectrum of sexual, intimate, and erotic actions instead (Weiss vii; Bauer, "BDSM Studies" 24). These practices are also often summarized under the umbrella term "kink" (Simula 8). According to Margot Weiss, even though non-normative sexualities can have a transformative potential, the dominant and affirmative narrative suggesting BDSM breaks with all norms has to be contested. BDSM does not take place in an isolated space outside of social power dynamics (Weiss 24, 160-161; Norman 222). In fact, social hierarchies, power dynamics, and exclusions continue to operate in BDSM scenes and communities (Weiss 15), whereby it often remains ambiguous whether a scene unquestioningly reproduces or breaks with stereotypes (Sexsmith 207–16; Cruz 409–36). That is why it is all the more interesting to take a closer look at practices that engage critically with this issue.

The Dan Daw Show can be placed in a rich context of Crip-queer performance art (Tadman *passim*; Campbell and Farrier *passim*), in which BDSM practices are used as a means of reappropriating pain, Crip bodies, control, and desire (e.g., the works of Crip performer and BDSM practitioner Bob Flanagan). This undermines the tendency to discuss sexuality and disability primarily in relation to "reproduction and sexual function" (Tellier 485), thereby asexualizing disabled bodies: "BDSM can focus on the boundaries of pain versus pleasure and has the potential to re-eroticise pain and the body" (489). From a Crip perspective, desired pain or loss of control can replace uncontrollable and unwanted pain and restore a sense of agency (McRuer 171–98; Sheppard *passim*; Reynolds *passim*).

In doing so, BDSM practices in Crip performances do not simply serve as a means to an end, but are in turn cripped. The performance scholar and disability theorist Carrie Sandahl describes "queering" and "cripping" (37) as practices that expose, question, break, and subvert normativities and celebrate bodies, modes of expression, and desires that cannot be

[1] For a performance analysis more focused on Kink and Cripping Sex, see Oeming (69–83).

fitted into supposedly pre-existing or fixed categories of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, but rather radically break them down and reveal their exclusions. BDSM is thus examined in terms of its norms but also its subversive potential, conspicuous, for instance, in the inherent care, the confrontation with pain, control and its loss, and the negotiated co-dependency. *The Dan Daw Show* crips and queers both heteronormative mainstream sexuality and BDSM discourses in the way it performs desire, lust, intimacy, and sexuality. Dan crips and queers sexuality and queers BDSM and his Crip body.

The performance starts out as a relaxed banter between the performers and the audience, including some access information and trigger warnings. There are many different attitudes, ideas, and feelings circulating around BDSM. These include discomfort, uncertainty, pleasure, lust, excitement, and interest. The beginning of the performance leaves room for these ambivalent, contradictory, and competing emotional dynamics, acknowledging them and, at the same time, arousing curiosity.

The BDSM play does not develop gradually but is established through a precise and recognizable switch in tone between the two. The artificiality of the hierarchy in and as role play is thus evident as such from the very beginning, a key element in BDSM (Schiel 214–16). In the shortest possible time, tension is created between the two bodies, which is transferred to the entire theatre space and can subsequently be experienced as a dynamic flow between suspension, desire, redemption, gazes, and physical touch, as well as its interruption by tapping out or using the safe word, followed by care actions. Instead of claiming the supposed intuitive naturalness of a private, normative sexuality and intimacy which must always fail in a public show setting anyway, its constructedness is made explicit (216). Krisx's commands throughout the performance are not always overtly sexualized but nevertheless charge the space erotically through their calm yet deliberate positioning in the power relationship. Thus, a broad understanding of intimacy and sexuality is made tangible from the outset.

The consensual submission of control on Dan's part in relation to his position as a queer, disabled person is noteworthy. What is staged is not the appropriation of control from a marginalized position, but rather its consensual and trustful abandonment by the disabled and queer performer—which is only possible because of the established safe and equal relationship (215). The supposedly fixed hierarchical roles are revealed as ambivalent and fluid throughout the performance. In turn, this not only contributes to the constitution of tension and excitement between the two performers, but also transfers it to the audience, creating a relational network among those present. This becomes clear when Dan addresses the audience: "I need you to understand that this is how I want you to see

me." In doing so, Dan frames the audience as constitutive of the intimacy created on stage and in the performance space.

As a form of intimacy, the tension produced on stage is not merely an effect of the performed BDSM relationship, but can be further differentiated via Sara Ahmed's queer-phenomenological concept of orientation to grasp the intimacy's spatial component (Kreuser 10, 34–38, 40–44). According to Ahmed, boundaries are not pre-existing but are effects of feelings through which subjects are brought into a relationship with one another. Both physical and social bodies are constitutive of each other and therefore remain inseparable and inherently relational. The way in which they relate to each other is largely emotionally structured (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion passim*). Thus, subjects and objects are always directed or oriented towards or away from each other (Kreuser 40; Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 32).

This orientation manifests itself in the performance, thereby constituting intimacy. The first thing that stands out is the extremely sharp attention of the performers towards each other. This focus on each other is interpreted as mutual trust and extends to the whole theatre space. In turn, this atmosphere enables the emergence of situations whose exact course is not entirely predictable. An example of this is Dan's selective exploration of his own physical limits. The quality of movement and contact between the two performers fluctuates between fast, sudden, and vigorous, and slow, tender, and tentative. By maintaining eye contact across the room or over the shoulder as they walk away, the two performers establish a constant relationship. The greater their physical distance gets, the more tension between them becomes affectively perceptible to the audience. Their desire—as well as their pleasure and joy—not only shapes the relationship between them but also their bodies as such, encouraging a reflection on "how bodies are shaped by pleasure and take the shape of pleasures" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* 164). The audience witnesses how Dan, with Krisx's support, (re)appropriates his body piece by piece as desiring and desirable and stages it, or rather has it staged by Krisx as he wants it to be. Queer desire is made tangible as a spatial orientation (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 147–48; Kreuser 43).

By perceiving and describing entities in their orientations, their supposedly natural separation as demarcated individuals is called into question as their constitutive relationality is revealed. When intimacy is understood as an emotionally and physically felt connection, as an openness and directionality towards other people, supposedly rigid subject boundaries become tangible as inherently porous and permeable. In *The Dan Daw Show*, this is shown through the intense focus of the performers towards each other, practising mutual responsibility and respecting each

other as vulnerable beings. This relationality is adopted as a fundamental principle of living together in this world, emphasizing a Crip perspective.

The play with proximity and distance is not limited to what happens on stage. The interdependent network is expanded spatially and oriented towards the audience, thereby involving the spectators in the performance that takes place. It is emphasized several times that Dan needs the audience in order to be seen in his self-empowerment. Thus, voyeuristic and violent gazes where a subject looks at a hierarchically lowered object for its own pleasure, which is historically inscribed in the theatrical context, are undermined and redefined (Schiel 110–11; Czirak 54, 118, 220). The audience does not merely witness an intimate and tense relationship between the performers; it becomes part of it. It is swept along and invited to let itself go along with Dan. If emotions are understood as dynamic and circulating, the audience cannot remain distanced at all. In fact, the tension created on stage circulates in the performance space; it touches, and moves the spectators, including them in an unfolding relational web.

Thus, the performed intimacy is only created as an atmosphere *because* the performers reveal their orientation towards each other and their spatiality in such an observable, tangible, and public way. As the porousness of the (physical) boundaries becomes more tangible, space is created to recognize each other as vulnerable human beings. A mindful attitude towards each other is necessary for successful intimacy, which is exemplified in *The Dan Daw Show* through the practice of consent.

CONSENT AS SUBJECT-CONSTITUTING PRACTICE

All too often, (sexual) intimacy is perceived as natural or as a given, as something intangible or magical that naturally accompanies certain actions or ways of relating (Schiel 215–16). This unfortunately still prevailing understanding of intimacy makes it difficult to discuss closeness and sexuality, needs, desires, and boundaries. Practiced and negotiated consent can be identified as a central strategy for creating intimacy in *The Dan Daw Show*, starting with the negotiation before play, as mentioned above. Analytically, this opens up various areas of tension and ambivalence.

Even though there is growing social awareness of sexualized violence and the role of consent in its prevention, the so-called affirmative understandings of consent are imbued with heteronormative ideas and neoliberal-contractualist notions of the subject (Graybill 175–76; Corteen *passim*; Saketopoulou 3, 6, 57; Buggs and Hoppe 1–18). As Fenner explains, "In this traditional script, men are the sexual initiators whose consent is constant and implied while women are the sexual gatekeepers whose consent

or non-consent is contractual" (455). In consent campaigns and in most research on consent, verbal consent is normalized as the "gold standard" (Beres 142) and the one and only means "to solve the problem" (137) of sexualized violence: "Consent is often positioned as the linchpin of sexual ethics and justice, framed within binary paradigms such as 'yes means yes' and 'no means no.' However, this fails to account for the complexities of power dynamics, ambiguous desires, and the interplay of verbal and non-verbal communication in sexual encounters" (Fanghanel 1).

Therefore, it is insufficient to assess consent *per se* as a subversive and ethical practice. Instead, it is important to reflect on the inherent norms and power dynamics. Especially in BDSM contexts, consent remains a contested field. Consent is regarded both within the BDSM scene and in academia as a key practice for distinguishing and differentiating BDSM from non-consensual, abusive violence (Weinberg 4–7, 17–18; Weiss 83; Bauer, *Queer BDSM Intimacies* 77). Various slogans or frameworks such as *Safe, Sane, and Consensual* (SSC) (Schiel 206), *Risk Aware Consensual Kink* (RACK) or *Caring, Communication, Consent, and Caution* (4C) (Williams et al. *passim*) have been articulated and used, first, to ensure that the practices carried out are consensual between the players and, second, to identify BDSM as a legitimate, cautious, and thoughtful sexual practice in a larger public discourse on sexuality.

Criticized as being too simplistic, these slogans are repeatedly rejected and/or reformulated by the community (Williams et al. *passim*; Weiss 84). Their applicability in scenes that play with consensual non-consent, or the question of to what extent lived sexuality can ever be guaranteed to be safe and "sane," are heavily discussed (Weiss 80–85). It is important to emphasize that these discussions within and outside the BDSM scene are not about rejecting consent practices, but rather about constantly reflecting on them and dealing with their irresolvable opacity and ambivalence (Simula 7; Buggs and Hoppe 1–18; Bauer, *Queer BDSM Intimacies* 75–106). Even though there is no explicit consensual non-consent play in *The Dan Daw Show*, Dan also emphasizes that he wants to be in control and be surprised at the same time.

In the performance, consent becomes tangible as a performative act of permission that is only effective when the statement or action is heard and taken seriously by the other person (Schnüriger 21; Müller and Schaber 1; Buggs and Hoppe 1–18; Butler, "Consent" 20). Even though Dan emphasizes at the beginning of the performance that he has given his consent to everything that follows, Krisx repeatedly asks for Dan's approval and checks in about Dan's current needs. They also show the sudden withdrawal of consent several times in an aesthetic of immediacy and realness, even though these moments may have been meticulously rehearsed.

In scenes in which Dan is pushed to his physical limits—once when he is asked to stand on a stretcher without help, another time when Krisx sweepingly whirls him around the room—Dan shouts his safe word "SPOONS!" As a spectator, one can be startled: has a boundary been crossed? Has something happened that was unplanned and should not have occurred? But Krisx always reacts promptly to Dan's exclamation, helps him down from the stretcher or stops the movement, brings a chair or water, looks at Dan seriously and talks to him reassuringly, his voice unamplified and therefore inaudible to the audience, whereupon Dan nods and takes a deep breath. The intimacy is thereby intensified as the viewer gets the impression of being part of an intimate relationship that is actually taking place —a relationship that is evolving performatively and in which boundaries and needs are explored in the moment of creating them. Tension and excitement are increased. Simultaneously, the audience is reassured that they are not witnessing intrusive, transgressive actions—because in moments in which boundaries are reached or crossed, acts of care take place. Krisx immediately stops, checks in, offers physical support, gets water, or a chair for Dan to sit on. In these moments, it remains unclear whether the actions are happening because of Dan's Cripness or as established practices within the context of kinky encounters. This is irrelevant: the simple moments of pausing, slowing down, and tending to one another's needs are shown as an important part of being intimate together.

Particularly in BDSM contexts that involve marginalized individuals, it is considered essential to reflect on consent practices in relation to ongoing power dynamics. It is crucial to be aware that BDSM scenes do not take place in a "safe, sane, and consensual vacuum" (Weiss 20) that exists untouched by the real world, but "in relation to economic, social, and cultural regimes and embedded systems of privilege and power" (Weiss 20). According to Weiss, neoliberal notions of a responsible, rational, autonomous subject with the ability of free choice are strongly linked not only within affirmative mainstream concepts of consent but also in BDSM contexts (18–19, 165–66). Both discourses often assume a "coherent subject" that remains "consistent" over a certain period of time—if not forever—in order to be able to engage in consent interactions at all: "It [the subject] must continue to be the same self that wants the same things" (Greenblatt and Valens 3). Thus, the acting subject is assumed to be a fixed entity, which implies that once consent is given, it remains constant. The very idea of stability is thereby associated with rationality or the ability to think reasonably, and thus has massive gendered, ableist, and racist implications.

Due to these historical exclusions, affirmative (re)claims of autonomy by oppressed people remain important as a counterpoint to their constant objectification and experienced paternalism. It is nonetheless key to not

just reproduce a hegemonic understanding of the apparently independent individual but to rethink this idea. *The Dan Daw Show* counters it with a relational and interdependent understanding of the subject. Verbal consent may be an important part of the performance, but it goes beyond a simple *yes means yes* since it is constantly re-negotiated. Communication about past scenes takes place. Dan also expresses which acts he desires and in what way. The palpable attention that the two performers pay to each other, their orientation towards each other, as described above, makes it evident that non-verbal cues are also indispensable to an intimate relationship. Consent is only established when the statements or non-verbal signals are taken seriously by the other person.

The performance thus draws on queer consent practices which emphasize ongoing communication on a verbal and non-verbal level as essential for sexual and intimate encounters (e.g., Beres 146). Beres notes the frequently used terminology of "tune in" (137) or "being 'in-tune'" (144) in queer consent discourse, referring to focused attention on the partner, which makes it possible to respond appropriately to feelings of well-being, discomfort, or hesitation (147).

The way in which the two performers are attuned to each other is transferred to the audience. The felt orientation can be recognized as *being tuned in* which becomes a dramaturgical strategy to captivate the audience and, at the same time, queers dominant and affirmative understandings of consent and subjectivity. Weinberg describes a "bodily understanding of consent" (16), referring to the embodied knowledge of one's own boundaries and needs, and memories of them being respected or violated. *The Dan Daw Show* draws on this embodied knowledge: by tuning in, the spectator's own, supposedly fixed subject boundaries are experienced as open, permeable, and vulnerable. Weinberg, among others, understands consent as a "boundary-making function that demarcates desired or undesired conduct, and, by extension, permissible and impermissible behaviour" (7) or, in other words, as a practice that creates boundaries. But at the same time, consent and the experienced tuning-in in the performance enable connection and fluidity, too.

The Dan Daw Show renegotiates consent throughout which it is experienced as a relational practice. This does justice to the Crip and queer idea of a processual subject that constantly (re)produces itself and is continuously (re)produced within certain structures. The neoliberal notions of subjectivity are rejected. The subject in *The Dan Daw Show* is fragile, fluid, and contradictory and, as such, is recognized in a dynamic understanding of consent. Hence, consent and BDSM are cripped: the inherent instability of (Crip) subjects is not a deficit or deviance but rather a fundamental aspect of existence as is (Kreuser 71). A relational, tangible

network stretches out across the space between performers and spectators. One becomes physically aware of one's own vulnerable and relational being which creates felt intimacy.

FEELING COMFORT, FEELING INTIMACY: TRIGGER WARNINGS

Intimacy is not only created during the performance through focused orientation and the practice of consent, but also through the awareness and access measures implemented in a broader performance context. In doing so, the performance not only establishes an alternative, relational concept of the subject on stage as in a distinct parallel universe, but also mirrors its ethics in a bigger setting, marking them as perfectly viable practices. When access needs are unconditionally met and valued, the so-called "access intimacy" can take place (Mingus *passim*).

The being-in-the-world of a body that is not norm-conforming can be experienced as a permanent friction of not fitting in. It is constantly confronted with socially evolved contours that are not perceptible to bodies that conform to normative frames (Kreuser 43; Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 147–48). In *The Dan Daw Show*, this is revealed by providing accessibility information at the beginning of the performance, thus marking supposedly self-evident elements such as loud music or bright lights as possible barriers for spectators.

In the following, I would like to draw attention to the trigger warnings of the performance and discuss them as a potential access and care strategy in relation to a performative concept of emotion (for a better overview of the Trigger Warning Debate, see e.g., Hilger 148–66; Ahmed, "Against Students").

If emotions and their objects are understood as circulating and performative, thereby producing bodily surfaces and subjects, not only the performance itself but also the trigger warnings for *The Dan Daw Show* can be analyzed through this concept of feeling. By informing the audience about potential triggers, it is acknowledged that the stage event does not take place in isolation. The spectators do not look at it from a distance. Rather, they get the chance to actively decide to visit the show and stay—to consent—to be emotionally touched and moved by the events unfolding on stage. They choose to be affected and thus to become part of the relational and intimate network that is created.

The production provides a detailed trigger list, available on their website, which makes no explicit distinction between sensory and content-related stimuli. Keyword-like triggers, such as Suffocation, Choking,

Sexually Explicit Depictions, Reaching Physical Limit, or Restraint, along with Loud Sound or Bright and/or Flashing Lights are listed (e.g., *Dan Daw Productions* website). The keywords are then explained in more detail—accessible with an extra click. The intensity of the triggers and how exactly they fit into the larger stage process are explained. It is important to emphasize that *The Dan Daw Show* reframes the above-mentioned acts. They can be understood and felt as assaultive actions, but are reinterpreted in line with the BDSM context of the performance as sources of pleasure, enjoyment, and empowerment (Weinberg 4–5). Still, the disturbing potential of these actions, despite their consensual and sexy-coded framing on stage, is acknowledged in the comprehensive trigger list.

The Dan Daw Show formally incorporates two decision points on its website, which considers the desires of those viewers who wish no prior information and want to be surprised, while also addressing the inevitable lack of precision of keyword- and exclamation-like warnings. Only those who intentionally choose to read the warnings by clicking on the relevant terms are informed. It is also possible to choose how much detail one wants to know about the warnings. It can thus be argued that the production not only negotiates the practice of informed consent aesthetically, i.e. on stage, but also thinks about it before the audience even attends the show.

A dominant criticism of trigger warnings or content notes suggests that the practice makes it impossible to confront and discuss uncomfortable, disturbing topics. Furthermore, the moment of "surprise" is described as evaporating because of anticipating "shocking" elements (Klieber 1–21; Washick 98–99). Without intending to equate shock with surprise, *The Dan Daw Show* evokes feelings of alertness and surprise in spite of the detailed warnings. These moments can also be linked to complex discussions about the limits of consent and pre-negotiated actions in kinky encounters. Robin Bauer emphasizes the inevitable opacity of consent: "one can never fully foresee and therefore understand all the possible ramifications of a certain act of consent" (*Queer BDSM Intimacies* 93). Dan is not the only one taking risks. It is also the spectator who is invited to carefully test their own boundaries. Through the implemented care actions and the mutual focus between the performers, the intimacy intensifies. Dan's physical boundaries are deliberately pushed to the limit, which is also repeatedly exposed and commented on. This pushing is a performative-aesthetic experience in co-presence which cannot be anticipated in a written warning, hence undermining the criticism mentioned above.

The trigger list ends with the keyword "sexy disabled people" (e.g., *Dan Daw Productions* website)—a statement that at first glance undermines the previously serious and objective instructions. Positioned at the end of the list, the warning about "sexy disabled people" as potentially

disturbing content can be interpreted as an ironic comment that mocks the practice of trigger warnings—are the previous warnings even meant seriously? Or are they rather making fun of the practice of giving (too) detailed warnings? If one considers how consistently care measures are considered and implemented in the whole performance and stage setting, I would rather assume an offensive approach to the inherent ambivalences of trigger warnings; an ambivalence which, while supporting the notion of giving information beforehand, still acknowledges the difficulties of it. It is important to reflect on what content or which stimuli are actually framed and (re)produced as worthy of forewarning (Hilger 150; Washick 98–99), which contents and stimuli are at all thought of and by whom. How can the fact that trigger warnings or content notes are inevitably "inadequate" (Ahmed, "Against Students"), as it is never possible to provide sufficient warning for every single person in a room, be dealt with?

To warn from "sexy disabled people" critically references heteronormative, able-bodied gazes in which Crip-queer desire finds no place. Moreover, exclusionary hegemonic structures only offer comfort to certain people who can live up to an able-bodied and/or heterosexual matrix. In this normative frame, the display and the lived experience of *other* desire function as a trigger of discomfort and are therefore often ignored, hidden, or fought against (Kreuser 50–54; Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* 146–65).

When a sensation is perceived as an "intrusion" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* 27), something hurtful, the sudden erection of a blockage follows (91, 200). This defensive and protective reaction results in the re-establishment of invaded subject boundaries and a turning away from the pain-inducing (triggering) object. When preparing the audience in advance for what they are about to see, scenes potentially interpreted as abusive are framed as deliberate moments and not unforeseen and unwanted interventions. One is invited to test these boundaries together with the performers, knowing that the implicitly given consent can be withdrawn at any time and the space can be left. In addition, the consent practised on stage reinforces the certainty that one will not witness an unconscious overstepping of boundaries. This does not reduce the tension but rather intensifies it through performed caution and therefore creates intimacy.

Becoming aware of one's own body can evoke feelings of discomfort or unease. This discomfort is triggered by the sense of not fitting into a certain context, compared to other objects and people. In realizing one's own relationality to and in certain structures, one materializes oneself (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* 146–48). Importantly, as Ahmed writes, "comfort is very hard to notice when one experiences it" (147). People who are marginalized constantly navigate this feeling of not fitting into normative structures that do not allow or include their

specific positionalities. Moreover, they are constantly made aware of their *otherness*, which they are forced to deal with by either adapting as best they can or making their otherness obvious. *The Dan Daw Show* focuses on creating comfort. The show tries to evoke feelings of safety, togetherness, and well-being in bodies that typically do not feel comfortable and relaxed in an able-bodied and heterosexually structured society. The detailed trigger warnings recognize and value a vulnerable spectator and attempt to develop a framework in which this vulnerability is not concealed but can be allowed. Relationality and interdependence are thus not only created and valued on stage, but also revealed off stage, whereby ethical responsibility is assumed for the actions performed.

Intimacy is created when people orient themselves towards each other and thus open themselves up to impressions, impulses, and emotions, both their own and those of the other person or people. Importantly, this openness and becoming permeable are not understood as an exception to the usual being in the world; rather, they reveal the inherent permeability and relationality of being. Furthermore, they expose the Western patriarchal idea of a firmly closed, constant, and independent individual as a fantasy.

According to Margot Weiss, BDSM scenes are often framed by the community as "as if," as fiction, played out without real consequences, passing without having any influence on reality (17–19). Framing these practices as "not real" (153) serves to legitimize them in mainstream discourse on sexuality. This strategy not only fails to recognize that hegemonic patterns and norms continue to operate even in role-playing games that are supposedly separate from reality, but also ignores their performative and transformative potential. *The Dan Daw Show* uses BDSM as a dramaturgical and aesthetic strategy to make Dan's Crip-queer body and his desire, his pleasure, intelligible—not in a fictional scene, but as a performative process of self-appropriation. Dan rejects a narrative that primarily codes disabled bodies as asexual and presents himself as desiring and desirable.

BDSM is not presented as a form of escapism from normal everyday life, to which one then returns unchanged (Weiss 181, 231). The performance does not enact escape, but celebrates arrival, thereby cripping a key element of BDSM. The intimate atmosphere of the performance intensifies at the end, when Dan and Krisx leave their roles, sit on the floor, leaning against each other, eyes closed, breathing heavily. They also allow the viewer to slowly let go of the built-up tension, take a deep breath, and become aware of what they have just witnessed. When Dan says: "Fuck me. I've arrived," the spectators are not only touched by his arc in this performance. They also realize that in allowing, opening up to, and thus co-constituting intimacy, they have to some extent "arrived" with Dan in their own bodies as deeply relational beings.

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