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WELCOME TO SERGEICHBURG: DISABILITY, CRIP PERFORMANCE, AND THE COMEDY OF RECOGNITION IN RUSSIA**

Recent scholarly work has understood disability as a culturally contingent concept and tracked the specificities of disabled identity in Russia. This article contributes a close reading of the online videos and television appearances of the disabled Russian comedian Sergei (Sergeich) Kutergin. It offers two possible interpretations of Kutergin's comedy: (1) as transgressive utterances that draw attention to prejudice against people with disabilities, or, (2) as assimilationist performances that reinforce the dominant logics of Russian masculinity and heterosexism. It proposes that a comedy of recognition encourages audience members to interpellate themselves within systems of power. Written for both Russophone and Anglophone readers, the article attempts to translate the theoretical notion of crip, as developed in Western disability studies, to the Russian context.

Keywords: disability, culture, performance, comedy, publics, masculinity

Introduction

This article builds on recent scholarly investigation of disabled identity in the Russian public sphere, considering disability as a socially constructed minority identity. Offering a close reading of the online videos and television appearances of disabled comedian Sergei Kutergin, known as Sergeich, this article examines Sergeich's performance of disabled identity, and considers it in terms of two possible interpretations: (1) transgressive utterances that draw attention to prejudice against people with disabilities, or, (2) assimilationist performances that reinforce dominant logics of Russian masculinity and hete-

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rosexism. Considering comedy as a mode of rupturing dominant paradigms, this article highlights how a *comedy of recognition* encourages audience members to interpellate themselves within systems of power. Written for both Russophone and Anglophone readers, the article attempts to translate the theoretical concept of a crip aesthetic or performativity, as developed in Western disability studies, to the Russian context.

Welcome to Sergeichburg

An online video clip. A comedian standing on stage tells a joke:

People watch me all the time... someone watching this video online probably thinks that their internet is slow! (Comedy Battle. Season 3, Episode 13).

Sergeich, the comedian, has Cerebral Palsy (in Russian, *DTsP* or *detskii tserbral'nyi paralych*). He walks confidently and wears a graphic t-shirt and suit jacket with jeans. His tone is ebullient, though his speech is unusually labored. His joke pokes fun at his difference, in this case, the slowness of his speech, and, the politics of staring (Garland-Thomson 2002; Phillips 2001: 139–150). At the same time, the joke references the online mode by which his image, ideas, and jokes travel.

Sergeich was a contestant on the 2012 season of a Russian television show *Comedy Battle*. The show aired on TNT, a channel featuring mostly comedy and entertainment programming. Additionally, clips of the show can be viewed and shared online. Sergeich, following his Comedy Club appearance, gained an online fan base, and even his earlier videos became popular. One, a rap parody video titled "Welcome to Sergeichburg!" (Kutergin 2011) is particularly compelling. There is no such city as Sergeichburg; rather, it is a made up place that exists only in the video, in which Sergeich himself is a hip-hop superstar. In creating the imaginary city of Sergeichburg, Sergeich opens a new metaphorical space. Sergeichburg, morphologically, is clearly *Russian* (Sergeich +*-burg*), but it is Russia redrawn, a Russia in which people with disabilities are recognized, embraced, and can be celebrated by their fellow citizens.

Sergeichburg is significant because of the normative marginalization of people with disabilities in Russian public life. People with disabilities are excluded both *materially*, as pedestrians and fellow citizens on the streets of Russian cities, where physical barriers block participation, and *symbolically*, when real voices of people with disabilities are left out of public discourse and mass media (Iarskaia-Smirnova, Romanov 2011), and many Russians would refuse to employ a person with a disability or send them to school with their child (FOM 2012). People with disabilities were systematically segregated, isolated, and institutionalized throughout the Soviet twentieth century, culminating in a state official declaring to an international audience that there *were no* people with disabilities in the USSR (Phillips 2009; 2011).

Soviet-built apartment complexes are still the most common type of housing in contemporary Russia, and are notoriously inaccessible (Kikkas 2001; Mazzarino 2013). In the Post-Soviet era, media coverage of people with disabilities has grown, often as journalists seek to cover "social problems"; frequently portrayed in this idiom, people with disabilities come to be seen as social problems themselves (for example, see: Verbilovich 2013: 263–264). Even as real people with disabilities are frequently left out of public discourse, metaphorical invocations of disabledness are frequent (Phillips 2011; Iarskaia-Smirnova, Romanov 2011). All of this renders Sergeich's appearance as a contestant, and as an actual person with DTsP on Comedy Battle remarkable. In these circumstances, televised events and online interactions become an important mode of social interaction and cultural engagement for people with DTsP. While people with disabilities in Russia are often physically isolated from their peers (Driakhlitsyna 2009; Kulmala 2013), Sergeich's online video clips – as a medium – have particular potency in that they can be shared across architectural barriers and passed via online networks of people with disabilities¹.

Sergeich's remarkable departure from Russian cultural norms of disability representation call to mind crip theory. The term *crip* is a linguistic innovation of disabled self-advocates. A self-described *crip* is a person who is tough and self-actualizing, the opposite of traditional understandings of crippled, as in, *in need of charity and help*. As a theoretical intervention, *crip theory* is often located at the intersection between disability studies and queer studies (McRuer 2006a; 2006b). These two spheres of critical theory – queer and crip – are each concerned with traditionally stigmatized populations, and work to understand how these subcultures form and develop pride in identities that are maligned by majority culture.

Orthographically *crip* is short for *cripple*. It came about as a rejection of politically correct language in favor of short, descriptive word. Like *queer*, *crip* reclaims a term that was once derogatory as empowering. A similar move is unfolding amongst some disability activists in Russia who refuse descriptors such as "people with special needs" in favor of the stigmatized but direct "*invalidi*" (Perspektiva 2012). In contemporary anglophone scholarly works, the word *crip* immediately references the goals of expanding rights and justice for people with disabilities. It also calls for public recognition of people with disabilities as imbued with personal characteristics that are opposed to traditional concepts of disability: strength, self-confidence, independence (or, considering feminist critiques, interdependence), sexuality, a sense of humor, and a sense of self that seeks liberation from stigma.

¹ Internet penetration in Russia is over fifty percent throughout the country (even in small cities) with higher user-ship in urban areas and amongst younger users. See: TNS Global Usage Report 2013 (<http://www.tns-global.ru/services/media/media-audience/internet/description/>)

Crip theory holds that a non-normative embodiment does not preclude participation as a citizen. Rather, able-bodiedness is a temporary condition of all human bodies. All humans experience physical and intellectual impairments, temporary or permanent, throughout our lives, and a great deal of cultural work goes into reproducing the myth of normalcy and the idea of the normative body (Davis 2006). This work of perpetuating a myth of a normal body is called *ableism*. *Ableism*, can be defined as the systematic discrimination and exclusion of people with disabilities, which functions to privilege able-bodied members of the population through institutional and cultural norms (Castenada et al 2000; Linton 1998: 9, 34–36). A crip outlook requires actively working to undo ableism, that system, which like other "-isms" (racism, sexism, heterosexism) works to discriminate and exclude, and, is intimately entwined with other systems of domination (McRuer 2006b).

Methodology

This article represents a continuation of a scholarly inquiry about how crip theory carries over into the Russian context (e.g. Hartblay 2013). Here, I offer a close reading and possible interpretations of two of Sergeich's comedic performances this article contributes to the project of analyzing discursive norms of disability and the related formation of *invalidnost'* as a minority group identity in the contemporary Russian cultural context (Markina 2013; Verbilovich 2013: 258; Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov 2011). The Russian public sphere is theorized in this article as an imagined community of strangers, continually re/produced, in which minority groups may or may not be interpellated as fellow citizens through performative action. The question of interpellation is elaborated through a close reading of how it is that Sergeich uses parody and comedy to rupture the normative discourse, recasting the role of people with disabilities. I am interested in the moment of recognition¹ when Sergeich's audience members must encounter their own ableism, or complicity in the marginalization of the disabled minority.

These concerns come out of my broader project of gathering ethnographic case studies of young adults living with disabilities in contemporary Russia. As an American scholar/activist, I am interested to see how western terms and theories map onto Russian realities, and aware that divergences may be as important to examine as convergences (Funk 2004). Although ethnographic analysis is not a part of this article, this close reading of Sergeich's work provides important cultural context for those anglophone readers encountering Russian confi-

¹ I use the word recognition here as a sort of inversion of Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition, wherein an actor fails to locate herself accurately in a network or hierarchy of power relations (e.g. complicity) (Bourdieu 1984:176,336. For an application of misrecognition to the postsoviet context, see: Rivkin-Fish 2005: 29).

gurations of disability, as well as offering context to sociology of disability in contemporary Russia. Although the methodology deployed in this article examines public discourse rather than ethnographic data, my interpretation is informed by a perspective on disability and the Russian public sphere gleaned through ethnographic interviews and participant observation (spread over twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork). Also, my interpretation of how crip theory translates cross-culturally between the US and Post-Soviet context is based in on-going conversations with scholars from both sides of the Atlantic¹.

Publics, Strangers, and the Comedy of Recognition

Comedy is an arena in which critical scholars recognize a potential for the subversion of dominant discourse even as that very discourse is performed (Yurchak 2006). Televised stand-up comedy can incite social transformation; it is a performative address that calls on dispersed audiences to assimilate shared truths (Yurchak and Boyer 2010). Broadcast technology, in its reception by an audience that actively interprets and integrates its messaging, "*mediates between reality and representation*" (Askew and Wilk 2002: 16). At stake, then, in Sergeich's televised comedy, is the dialectical relationship between the representation of people with disabilities and the actual behavior of Russians toward disabled fellow citizens. A shift in the social status of people with disabilities as a minority group (in Russia) becomes possible in the public arena, where stereotypes or cultural norms are both enacted and challenged (Verbilovich 2013: 261).

Comedic performance offers an important opportunity to disrupt able-ism. McRuer argues that both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness are inscribed through performative utterance and repetitive action. McRuer argues that "able-bodiedness itself not only [is] a compulsory law, [but an] inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer able-bodied identity as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative disabled perspective" (McRuer 2006a: 304)². A crip sensibility *reveals the able-bodied norm as a comic farce*. Through performative parody or camp, the queer or crip performer reveals the hypocrisy of normalcy and its precarious contingency.

¹ I would like to thank the international community of scholars, activists, and people with disabilities who have contributed to the production of this work. First, of course, those who have participated as narrators in my ethnographic work on social experiences of disabled identity in contemporary Russia. Russian scholars Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova, Valeria Markina, Olga Verbilovich, and other graduate student participants at the Sociology of the Public Sphere seminar at the Higher School of Economics, Spring 2012. And, the hosts and participants of the Crippling Development conference in Prague, September 2013.

² McRuer is proposing a concept of compulsory able-bodiedness that builds on the concept of compulsive heterosexuality by paraphrasing Butler's description in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999), thus extending queer theory into crip theory.

Queer/crip comedic performance makes light of and reveals the extraordinary cultural work that goes into reinforcing normalcy, and, by transgressing expected rules of behavior applied to certain embodiments, exposes our habitual complicity in the reproduction of the norm (McRuer 2006a).

Sergeich's comedy is part of a broader idiom of disabled performance that forces an (often able-bodied) audience to relate to the experiences of disabled persons. For instance, Josh Blue, an American comedian with Cerebral Palsy was the winner of a TV-show called "Last Comic Standing" (2006), similar in format to Comedy Battle. Even some of Josh's jokes share elements with Sergeich's. For example, they each tell a joke about how they got in to comedy (1:40). Sergeich's version reads:

People ask me how I got in to comedy. And I look at them and say, "What else was I gonna do – become an airline pilot?!" I mean, imagine – it'd be like – you sit down on a plane, and I start talking, with my voice – you'd be stunned. [emphasizing the waver and slowness of his voice] "Ladies and gentlemen, were now at a cruising altitude of 10,000 kilometers – and everything is FINE!" (Comedy Battle, Season 3, episode 13).

In this joke, the popular associations of slow/labored speech with intoxication and incompetence, or, of rapid and steady speech with competence, allow Sergeich to poke fun at the kinds of occupations that would not be open to someone "like him". At the same time, by referencing drunken speech, the joke functions to draw attention to the ways that all bodies are only temporarily able-bodied: drunkenness is an impairment that his able-bodied audience can relate to.

The joke plays on what I want to call the *comedy of recognition*: the audience recognizes the horror they would experience as a reaction to hearing such a seemingly intoxicated voice from someone piloting an aircraft, and they laugh, agreeing that they would be shocked. They are also implicated in recognizing their own assumptions about what someone with DTsP can and cannot do. And, in doing so, they recognize Kutergin as both a fellow citizen and as a member of a particular minority group (the disabled) characterized by a set of experiences of discrimination.

The concept of *recognition* has multiple theoretical resonances. Nancy Fraser's essay on the politics of redistribution and recognition (Fraser 1997; Shakespeare 2006) theorizes the manner in which identity comes to stand for a class of people within society. This is useful in considering the path to justice for minority groups in a complex social field in the Russian context as well as in the West (for example, Verbilovich 2013). The notion of *recognition* deployed here is also a sort of theoretical inverse to its linguistic cousin, Bourdieu's concept of *misrecognition*. *Recognition* as a theoretical concept is bound to Althusser's concept of interpellation, of recognizing oneself as a citizen, as the intended audience of a public utterance (Yurchak 2006: 116; Althusser 1971). Warner's discussion of publics, particularly the moment in which a person recognizes an address as referring to him or herself and thus becomes a member of an audience or agentive public, considers and revises Althusserian interpellation (Warner

2005: 77–78). By juxtaposing this complex of *recognition* with the crip notion of *comedy* described by McRuer (2006a: 304), that is, a performative unveiling of the absurdity of ableism, to form the phrase *comedy of recognition* I mean specifically, a moment in which a transgressive performance does two things: (1) it implicates the audience in the reproduction of ableism, *and*, (2) retains a comedic effect via the everyday notion of recognition – that is, the audience member laughs because he recognizes something of himself in the joke.

Sergeich both makes the audience laugh, and draws their attention to the lived reality of inhabiting a disabled body. Sergeich creates space for the audience to encounter the difference of his body with humor, rather than with pity or disdain. Again, the very fact that he has created an audience for a disabled body is, in itself, significant.

But what is an audience? This meta-event of creating an audience, in the digital sphere or in the televised ether, for a disabled Russian body, deserves some unpacking.

Social theorist Michael Warner points out that there are many different ways in which we deploy the term "public" in common speech. The "public sphere" as used in politics refers to a very particular idea going back to Habermas. In this usage "the public" is almost always related to a state or citizenship. "Public" often simply means "audience" – a group of readers (like the readers of this essay), or viewers and listeners (as in a theater or listening to a radio broadcast). The two meanings overlap at times, for example, moments when an amassed public listens to a speech on a patriotic topic. Warner observes that we often use the idea of a public as a shorthand, in order to avoid having to comprehend the vast, unknowable, and heterogeneous nature of any of these collectivities. So, an address that creates a public is "an address to indefinite strangers" without a "sutured space of circulation" (Warner 2005: 120). Television audiences become part of the "public" simply by watching; yet they remain strangers to one another and to the performers. As an individual audience member both contributes to the formation of a public, she is also recreated as a subject; her sense of identity is altered by an awareness of the public being formed, of strangers perceiving her as a stranger (Matza 2009).

In the modern world, strangers are everywhere (Warner 2005; Simmel 1950: 402–408). Strangers – on the metro, in the market place, voting at the polling place – are critical to our modern social imaginary and sense of self. Warner writes:

In modern society, a stranger is not as marvelously exotic as the wandering outsider would have been in an ancient, medieval, or early modern town. In that earlier social order, or in contemporary analogues, a stranger is mysterious, a disturbing presence requiring resolution. In the context of a public, however, strangers can be treated as already belonging to our world. More: they *must* be. We are routinely oriented to them in common life. They are a normal feature of the social (2005: 74–76).

The stranger is akin to the citizen, a fellow subject in the imagined community of the modern state (Anderson 1997). Appearing as a contestant – or talented stranger – on television or web video, then, Sergeich is hailed by viewers as a stranger worthy of attention. This is significant because strangers in the Soviet public imaginary – with the possible brief exception of heroes of the Great Patriotic War – were always able-bodied (Phillips 2009; Kikkas 2001). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, disability activists in Russia have been working to change the public perception of disability (Iarskaia-Smirnova 2001; 2011; Phillips 2011).

Given this theoretical explication of the audience or public, we can see that the media presentation of Sergeich's performances produce him as a Russian stranger-citizen. Sergeich postulates a public in which strangers may be differently bodied, and the disabled are seen and heard along with other citizens. Sergeich, simply by appearing on the show, or in the online videos, calls into being a public that recognizes people with disabilities as fellow citizens.

Moving our attention to the Sergeichburg video, Sergeich seems to voice this shift in the perception of disabled citizens, rapping,

So many friends, so many around – seems like you're in Sergeichburg!
A city of friends, a city of girls!
In Moscow or Anapa – it feels like Sergeichburg!

Sergeichburg is an imaginary place full of imaginary strangers, but these imaginary strangers recognize Sergeich, who is the most popular *chuvak* in town. In the video, Sergeich cruises around in a gold convertible, consorting with famous comedians and hot babes. The video although there are no specific "jokes", presents a carnivalesque atmosphere in a genre that is legibly a parodic gangsta rap video. Whether in Anapa or Moscow, the video suggests, there is a certain state of mind that *is* Sergeichburg. In the Sergeichburg state of mind, disability does not preclude participation and success.

Parodic comedy, along with its Russian cousin *stiob*, may function to shift the dominant paradigm by embodying it with subtle changes (Yurchak, Boyer 2010). Parody can reveal to hegemonies of style, hypernormalization that otherwise goes unnoticed. Yurchak and Boyer argue that such performance allows the "invisible and unthinkable" to be "suddenly recognized and apprehended (2010: 212)", and can dramatically alter public perception. In this case, Sergeich's performance reveals two elements of hypernormalization in Russian mass culture: the uniformity of bodies, and the tropes of masculine success. By encouraging the audience to recognize that strangers with DTsP are normally excluded from a Russian masculinity, it also lays bare the components of this masculinity, which Sergeich pokes fun at in the video: leisure, money, cars, disposable sexualized women, and powerful friends. The parody invites the viewer to question the status quo through a dissonance of form (what's that disabled guy doing with those hot women?), a potential subversion of the dominant paradigm, but the execution is playful. Sergeich relishes the

role of kingpin, and the expression of masculinity. This is where the element of *stiob* enters: it is unclear whether he is mocking or identifying with these images; it seems to be some of both.

Yurchak describes *stiob* as an ironic aesthetic that thrived in late-Soviet socialism. *Stiob* "differed from sarcasm, cynicism, derision or any of the more familiar genres of absurd humor" in that it "required such a degree of *over-identification* with the object, person, or idea at which [it] was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two" (Yurchak 2006: 250; see also 1999: 84). I hesitate to call Sergeich's parody *stiob*, in that Yurchak has developed the term specifically to refer to mockery of "official" discourse, while Sergeich aligns himself with the figure of the rapper. The hip-hop kingpin plays with a paradigm of illicit masculine success; at the same time that the rapper holds cultural clout, he bucks "decency" and domesticity, everything "official" (McRuer 2006b: 66–70; Bailey 2011).

Kutergin – visibly an *invalid* – does not live the life depicted by his character, kingpin of Sergeichburg. This is a masculine role reproduced in the gender order of contemporary Russian digital publics – from MTV to advertisements (Yurchak 2000). Disabled people, in otherwise invisible logics of neoliberal Russia, are considered to be in need of protection, and in need of care. They are excluded from the world of work, and therefore of labor and masculinity as the breadwinner for the family- a discursive identity, related to what Yurchak has elsewhere called *muzhskaia ekonomika* or, *an economics of masculinity* (2001). In Sergeichburg, Kutergin makes visible this exclusion by rupturing the reproduction of masculine success as always able-bodied. In this way, Sergeich enacts a Russian crip performativity by calling attention to and subverting normative Russian logics about disability.

Crip Masculinity: From Social Problem to Therapeutic Citizen

Sergeich's appearance on the final episode of the Comedy Battle season helps to unpack the relationship between disability, masculinity and normativity. In this episode ("Comedy Battl" Season 3, Episode 19). Sergeich has made it to the final round of Comedy Battle; a winner for the season will be selected and prizes distributed. A teaser raises the drama: how will Sergeich fare in this high-pressure moment?! Something, it's hinted, goes awry. Indeed, when Sergeich's turn arrives, the show departs from its usual format – a contestant's stand-up routine, followed by judging. Sergeich steps out onto the stage more or less as usual. Then, in a sequence that is constructed with such a contrived series of repetitive cuts that the experienced reality-TV-viewer quickly observes the emotional intensity to be partially manufactured, Sergeich appears to become suddenly nervous, stammering over his words and losing confidence. He asks the judges to allow him to leave the stage to get a drink of water. They urge him to do so, with exaggerated empathy.

When he returns, instead of continuing with his stand up routine, he expresses his deep gratitude for the opportunity to be on the show. His performative tone shifts from stand-up comedy to personal confessional. Appearing on *Comedy Battle*, he says, has changed his life. Not only because of the professional advance, he goes on, but because it enabled him to meet the woman of his dreams. He then describes meeting and falling for a woman from a neighboring building in his own hometown. It was only after his appearance on *Comedy Battle*, Sergeich explains, that she noticed him. In a confessional tone he explains to the judging panel and audience that he is now engaged to be married. The camera cuts to a pretty girl with a shy smile and shining brown hair – the fiancée.

"Is this for real?" asks one of the judges. "It's totally true," replies Sergeich. Sergeich has obtained a normative measure of masculine success: he got the girl (and she's hot!). The normative impossibility of this outcome makes visible the degree to which disabled bodies do not appear in the Russian mass media as neighbors and strangers and citizens. Sergeich has become desirable. His appearance on *Comedy Battle* redefined him as a man, as per Yurchak's estimation: this occurred simultaneously both symbolically – as his image was pixelated and delivered to living rooms across Russia – and literally – as his earning potential as a comedian skyrocketed with his new widespread reach.

In this segment, the *Comedy Battle* producers intentionally break from the format of the show in order to create a space to talk about Sergeich's experience of difference. Playing on the sympathy of the audience, Sergeich first "disables" himself: he is nervous, fallible, and in need of indulgence or special treatment (leaving the stage to get water in the middle of a set). But, after he tells the story of how he met his fiancée, and the camera cuts to show her seated in the audience, the segment reveals Sergeich in a different light: as a desirable husband and partner.

On the one hand this break in the usual sequence of the show to allow for Sergeich's personal disclosure might be seen as "special" treatment that prolongs a reification of disabled identity as different and requiring some manner of extra help. On the other hand, by deploying the idiom of self-realization and therapeutic self-reinvention, Sergeich is further interpellated as a fellow citizen, in that he is included in the spectacle of public self-making, the bourgeois project of therapeutic self-improvement. The concept of contemporary Russian therapeutic citizenship and the (re) production of this idiom through broadcast media has already received in recent sociological work (Lerner and Zbenovich 2013; Kayiatos 2012; Matza 2009). "Reality" genres like *Comedy Battle* are particularly ripe for this type of cultural work.

For example, Lerner and Zbenovich (2013) describe the manner in which therapeutic discourse is manifest in Russian public culture, by reviewing the rhetorics of self-making on a popular Russian fashion makeover show. They observe that a standard component of this idiom is the discovery by a judges' panel of a relationship between internal and external characteristics (or flaws) of the person under consideration. Internal psychic issues are revealed to be the root of external disorder or pathology of the citizen in question (Lerner and

Zbenovich 2013: 840, 844). Through the public intervention on the show, a person's psychic pathology is revealed, and she is afforded the self-awareness to take control of both her outward appearance and thus her inner self. Similarly, Tomas Matza describes the process by which Russian citizens participating in various "reality" or "talk show" programs, deploy discourses of popular psychotherapy (2009: 491–492), and in doing so, produce themselves as rational subjects, who, by working on themselves by interrogating and relieving themselves of psychiatric "complexes," are contributing to a project of Russian national improvement (493–494).

Thus, this process of shedding one's hang-ups or complexes by engaging in popular psychotherapeutic discourses can be considered a legible manner by which contemporary Russians assert themselves as citizens. Given this configuration, Sergeich's final performance on Comedy Club could be interpreted in yet another way. His sudden stuttering and departure from the comedic script can be seen not as producing him as disabled or weak, but as a mode of integration into Russian citizenship via the discourse of therapeutic citizenship. Rather than the Soviet public denial of the very existence of bodies like Sergeich's (Phillips 2009), Comedy Club's producers, by casting Sergeich as a participant in this project of rational self-realization, produces him, and his body, as identifiably Russian first, and disabled second.

Conclusion

This article has considered the ways in which the Russian comedian Sergeich disrupts the reproduction of ableist paradigms, and described his performative idiom as a comedy of recognition. It has also considered Sergeich's performance through the lens of crip theory as developed by Western scholars. It is tempting to argue that Sergeich's work is *crip* and transgressive. But even as Sergeich's non-normative body is "included" in the media, the manner in which his narrative is folded into a normalizing, disciplining discourse means that even as he is "recognized" as a fellow citizen, his trajectory is ultimately assimilationist, and this implicit critique of the marginalization of disabled Russians is also complicit in reproducing a heterosexist masculinity. This complexity is linked to the difficulty of translating disability studies across cultural contexts. Crip theory relates to cultural logics of inclusion and exclusion along lines of bodily deviance, and these logics are culturally contingent. More work is needed to delineate and theorize the contours of disability inclusion and exclusion in contemporary Russia.

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