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Costume Design and Who Gets to Get it

Adopting a Crip-Positive Approach to Costuming

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Abstract

This thesis analyses my artistic work on designing the costumes for the theatre performance *'Livsfarligt på allvar! A hard-to-interpret murder mystery'* (2024). My costume design for this performance is framed through Crip theory and focuses on how accessibility can be achieved in embodied ways through costume design. Accessibility is addressed both on-stage and off-stage, for audience members and artistic collaborators. To achieve this, I collaborated with accessibility consultants to ensure functionality and artistic integrity. I point out the importance of representation and approaching all bodies through neutral eyes in fostering an accessible space in the performing arts, and how crucial this is, especially in the costume fittings. I discuss how this production was accessible for me, a disabled costume designer, and what I observed regarding the work methods that affected the broader work group.

The early stages of the costume design process were a part of a broader exploration of artistic accessibility, led by DuvTeatern through the TIKSI programme. During this phase, I hosted workshops to research auditory information conveyed by costume elements. I also conducted an introductory costume workshop for the performers of DuvTeatern, where, through freeform and expressive garment modification, I introduced myself and my work to my artistic collaborators. I documented this exploratory phase of the research through audio recordings, diary entries, and photographs, which are included in the thesis.

This thesis aims to demonstrate how implementing Crip-positive artistic methods and work approaches in productions can cultivate a more human-friendly environment for all. I highlight how the extensive bodily and sensory knowledge that costume designers already possess can be harnessed towards more accessible performance making.

Keywords accessibility, accessible theatre, costume, costume design, Crip theory, disability

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Tiivistelmä

Tämä opinnäytetyö käsittelee saavutettavaa pukusuunnittelua, mitä se voisi olla ja miten minä lähestyin sitä taiteellisessa työssäni, työssäni pukusuunnittelijana *'Livsfarligt på allvar! Vaikeatulkintainen murhamysteeri'* (2024) teatteriesityksessä. Tutkin tätä taiteellista työtä erityisesti Rampateorian kehittämien työkalujen kautta. Esitän miten saavutettavuus voi koskea taiteellisia kolleegoita, että yleisöä, ja kuinka pukusuunnittelijat voivat luoda representatiivista, moniaistillista sekä kehollista saavutettavuutta taiteellisen työnsä kautta. Huomioin myös, kuinka kehoneutraalin lähestymistavan omaksuminen luo turvallista, ja täten saavutettavaa, tilaa moninaisille kehollisille kokemuksille, etenkin pukusovituksissa. Avaan taiteellisen työn saavutettavuutta itselleni, rammalle pukusuunnittelijalle. Pohdin, kuinka saavutettavuuteen pyrittiin, kuinka onnistuimme saavutettavuudessa ja mitä huomioin työmetodien saavutettavuudesta koskien muuta työryhmää. Alleviivaan saavutettavuuskonsulttien tärkeyttä toimivien ja mielekkäiden ratkaisujen saamiseksi.

Produktion alkumetreillä tutkimme taiteellista saavutettavuutta DuvTeaternin fasilitoimassa TIKSI-kehityshankkeesa. Tämän hankkeen aikana tutkin pukujen äänellisiä ominaisuuksia työpajojen kautta. Järjestin myös vapaamuotoisen ja luovan pukutyöpajan DuvTeaternin näyttelijöiden kanssa esitelläkseni itseni taiteellisena tekijänä. Dokumentoin työpajat, niiden tulokset, että tuotokset äänitteillä, kirjallisilla muistiinpanoilla sekä valokuvilla, joiden tulokset jaan opinnäytetyössäni.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoite on osoittaa, kuinka Rampaystävällisten taiteellisten- ja työmetodien omaksuminen voi luoda ihmisystävällisemmän taiteen kentän meille kaikille. Huomioin, kuinka pukusuunnittelijoiden laaja kehollinen ja ihmisläheinen tietämys on hedelmällinen kasvualusta saavutettavammalle taiteelle, kun saavutettavuudelle annetaan aikaa.

Avainsanat saavutettavuus, saavutettava teatteri, puku, pukusuunnittelu, Rampateoria, vammaisuus

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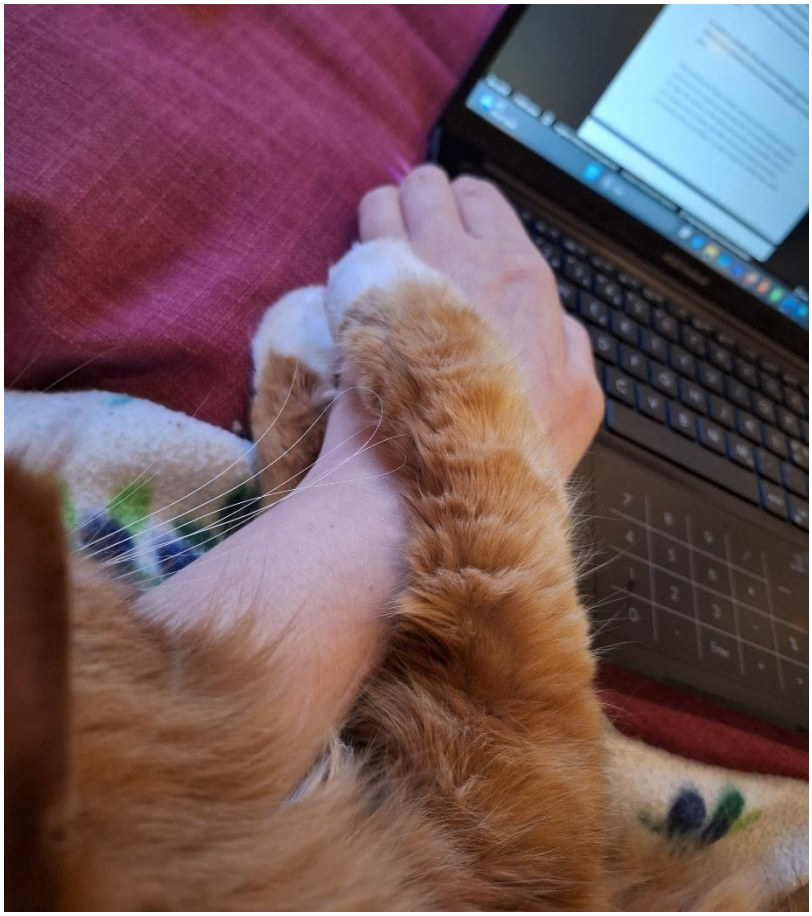

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1. Introduction

What does disability look like?

In his book 'Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability', Robert McRuer notes how "able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a non-identity, as a natural order of things." (McRuer, 2006). Expecting able-bodiedness and regarding it as the default way to exist creates a vacuum of disabled stories and experiences. As disabilities form a minority that can exist within any other minority or majority, this is a major gap in representation. Around 10% of the world's population is disabled (United Nations, n.d.), experiencing different kinds of disabilities, which makes us the world's largest minority group. In countries with a life expectancy of 70 years or over, people spend on average about 8 years of their life being disabled (United Nations, n.d.). Anyone can become disabled at any point in their life, either temporarily or permanently.

When there are few to no disabled voices telling our stories, who gets to tell them? Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie verbalised the problematic consequences of this lack of representation in her TED talk, pointing out that "power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person" (Adichie, 2009). When this definitive story does not cover the full picture, or worse, shares a falsehood as a reality, a great effort can go into disproving these stories before even getting to tell our own. These stories told of disabled existence by nondisabled people affect accessibility in practical, physical ways, as well as transcending the physical, from not having theatre performances with audio description or wheelchair accessibility to disabled people not feeling heard or considered within the space.

When discussing the representation of characters and identities, costume designers play a key role. Costumes "converse, mask, and play up the bodies who wear them and the identities represented" (Joseph, Ferrero-Regis, and Kerr, 2023). Through this conversation, costume designers co-create with the performing body. In this co-creation, costume designers can facilitate accessibility both on and off stage. Are the portrayed characters disabled, or are the performers themselves disabled? If the performer is disabled, is the character also represented as such? What

values and assumptions are tied to people perceived as disabled? How do we consider people with invisible disabilities?

The representation of people with disabilities, or the lack thereof, is what shapes mainstream understandings of disability. Often, such representation is done through able-bodied performers. These able-bodied performers may "don" a 'disability costume', as in the musical *'Elefantasia'* (2020, dir. Drabek, costume design Simona Rybakova), or mimic unspecified characteristics the audience interprets as indicators of disability, like Leonardo DiCaprio did in the film *'What's Eating Gilbert Grape'* (1993, dir. Hallström, costume design Renee Ehrlich Kalfus). This practice reinforces the idea that disability is a costume one can try out, which enforces a shallow understanding of the various experiences of disabled individuals.

Disability visibility was something I grew increasingly interested in through my university studies. How are disabilities represented in the field of performing arts and cinema? Does the co-creative work of costume design differ in any way when working with able-bodied versus disabled bodies? How do invisible disabilities affect my work as a costume designer? The latter question became especially personal after I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at the tail end of my bachelor's degree.

1.1. Thesis Topic and Research Methods

In this thesis, I examine accessibility within the framework of costuming. This is achieved by critically analysing my artistic work as the costume designer for the theatre production *'Livsfarligt på allvar! A Hard to Interpret Murder Mystery'* (2024). Using an autoethnographic method, I reflect on how accessibility was implemented, both artistically and practically, for audiences and performance makers, during the production process. I also identify areas for improvement in the future. By applying an autoethnographic approach within the theoretical framework of Crip theory, I foster a discussion between my work and the contributions of others in the fields of disability and costume design studies. I kept a research diary throughout the artistic process, and I reflect on both written and recorded diary entries. This personal reflection is supported by voices from disability rights activists and researchers, as well as researchers from the field of costume design.

1.1.1. My Background and Motivation

Uncertainty of our bodily existence is a shared truth; some experience it earlier than others. I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, colloquially MS disease, in my late twenties, when I spontaneously became blind in one eye. Eyesight came back with treatment, but other symptoms have made their home in me. I get tired easily, cognitively and physically, and sometimes I need to rely on a cane to support my movement. Other various symptoms come and go. Overexertion worsens symptoms and can cause severe headaches. Aside from the occasional use of my cane, one might not guess me to be disabled by looking at me.

My diagnosis has caused me to reflect on how to work and exist sustainably. Since pushing my boundaries one day means that I need to rest for the next two, I need to be uncomfortably honest about my limits with myself and others around me. My disability, being largely nonvisible, has revealed to me how differently people can treat me depending on whether they see me as disabled or not. I have experienced people having difficulties respecting the boundaries I have set, only to let go when they find out that I am indeed disabled. I have often been thought to be lazy. Of course, having to share the medical reason for setting strict boundaries does not always guarantee being respected. "We all get tired sometimes!" This frustrating,

difficult and sometimes invasive dance of giving enough reasons for the other person to respect my needs has caused me to wonder how this culture is fostered, and how we could nourish a healthier approach. Specifically, how could I nourish a more inclusive and understanding atmosphere in my work as a costume designer?

As I am on the cusp of graduating from my Master's studies, I have noticed how my new disabled identity converges with my burgeoning identity of a professional costume designer. What is it that I bring to the field? How can I keep up with my able-bodied colleagues? Working on *'Livsfarligt på allvar! A Hard to Interpret Murder Mystery'* (2024) has broadened my vision of the future and given me new perspectives. The production revealed to me a large network of professionals interested specifically in accessibility in the performing arts. This collaboration allowed me to explore what artistic value accessibility can hold and what costuming can bring to the table.

1.1.2. Aims and Objectives

With this thesis, I contribute to the discourse on accessibility from the perspective of a disabled costume designer. I aim to bridge Crip theory with costume theories to draw attention to crip-positive, accessible costuming - what it could be and how it could be approached. I provide examples of how costume designers play a key role in facilitating accessibility on- and offstage: in the language we use to discuss costumes, bodies, and costumed bodies, and in how we work with these bodies. I note the importance of representation in the pursuit of accessibility, as costume designers can create, facilitate, and support accessibility through representation. While this thesis discusses the themes of accessibility and representation in the context of disability, these themes are equally relevant to other minority experiences. These themes intersect with and contribute to broader conversations in intersectional feminist and queer studies. With this thesis, I wish to exemplify how accessibility benefits everyone, and, through the concept of Crip time, give an example of how this could be so.

1.1.3. Research Questions

To reach my objectives, I have used the following research questions:

What tools already exist in the costume designer's toolkit that can and are being used to foster accessibility? Could Crip theory give tools for costume designers to create more artistically accessible art? How could a more Crip positive approach on- and offstage foster a healthier and more accessible work culture?
Who would benefit from this?

1.2. Thesis Structure and Framework

My thesis, titled '*Costume Design and Who Gets to Get it: Adopting a Crip-Positive Approach to Costuming,'* introduces key elements and terminology in chapter 2: On Accessibility and Crip Time. Terms such as Crip Time, ableism and accessibility, what they are and how they can be applied in performing arts.
This lays the base for chapter 3: Accessibility and Costume Design, which focuses on various accessibility means within costume design practice, on stage and offstage. From there, chapter 4: Case Study: TIKSI and '*Livsfarligt på allvar! A hard-to-interpret murder mystery'* (2024) opens my artistic work on the performing arts development project called TIKSI, and the theatre production '*Livsfarligt på allvar! A hard-to-interpret murder mystery'* (2024) that was born of the project. The chapter flows from explaining TIKSI, to analysing costume workshops I held during my artistic work and concludes with the finalised costumes I designed for the theatre production. Chapter 5: Reflections gather my thoughts on how I personally experienced accessibility to be present in the artistic process. The chapter shares my main findings on how to adopt a Crip-positive approach in costume design. Chapter 6: In Conclusion returns to my research questions, how I approach answering them and explains why accessibility affects us all.

2. On Accessibility and Crip Time

There are countless facets to being human, but the mainstream representation of people has long been limited to a select few. Societal elements, such as beauty ideals, define who is seen as representative of humanity and in what ways. While these ideals vary in detail across history and fluctuate between cultures, the representation of able-bodiedness has consistently remained fashionable. This can be a false representation, as can be noted in the idealisation of thinness in recent decades, where the appearance of health is valued more than actual health status. This phenomenon is closely tied to the obsession with youth, or being perceived as youthful as possible. As we age, our health inevitably declines, regardless of how well we care for ourselves. Even the healthiest among us will eventually die. The fixation on youth and perceived able-bodiedness can be viewed as a form of escapism from our mortality. Being old, sick, and/or disabled disrupts that escapism. Therefore, being visibly old, sick, or disabled is deemed undesirable and is not wanted to be seen.

Actively hiding or passively forgetting, or omitting groups of people from discussions, creates a homogeneous portrayal of a heterogeneous reality. In the context of disability, this erasure or suppression of experiences can be described as ableism, defined as “discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). While ableism can be aggressive, it more often arises from a well-meaning, albeit ignorant, attitudes. If minority experiences are overlooked and not given space, this lack of representation often exacerbates further exclusion and inaccessibility. Disability activist and blogger known online as ‘Pacing Pixie’ has created a graphic illustrating the Inaccessibility Cycle phenomenon. In this graphic (Figure 1), Pixie depicts inaccessibility as a self-fulfilling phenomenon preventing disabled individuals from participating, leading to their underrepresentation, which in turn reinforces the perception that disabled people are rare and thus do not need to be taken into consideration.
This completes the cycle, returning to inaccessibility (Pacing Pixie, 2021). It is essential to include disabled individuals, as well as any minority group, in discussions that concern them. “Nothing about us without us” is a slogan that has been utilised in various political contexts to underline the necessity of including those directly affected in the discourse (Zarkhosh, 2024).

Figure 1. The Inaccessibility Cycle by Pacing Pixie. https://www.instagram.com/p/CEe-5GajzTn/ [Accessed 15 Jun. 2025].

Time is often regarded as an equal resource. Phrases like 'You have the same amount of hours in a day as Beyoncé,' frequently encountered on the internet, reflect this assumption of equality. The truth, however, is more nuanced. Beyoncé has access to resources that most of us could never attain due to her wealth. Her 24 hours differ significantly from ours, as she has assistants helping her with every aspect of work, leisure, and everything in between. Thus, time is not an equal resource among people with differing financial means. The same applies to individuals with varying levels of ability and disability. Many physical and cognitive resources are often overlooked when one does not have to account for them carefully to navigate daily life.

This disparity is illustrated in the Spoon Theory, coined by Miserandino (2013). The Spoon Theory is a tool widely adopted by disabled people as a metaphor to communicate limited bodily or cognitive resources. The theory uses spoons as tangible and countable objects to signify the invisible energy resources disabled people need to count and use mindfully each day. While a morning shower, walking to work, and meeting friends for coffee are rather pleasant tasks one might not even think twice about adding on top of their daily to-do list, for a disabled person, each of these actions costs energy. Life is different when you have 10 "spoons" to use per day in contrast to someone else's 80. This calculation of energy reserves could also be likened to counting pennies when there is little money that needs to be stretched to cover one's needs. The equation often feels unfair and impossible. As it would be unhelpful to compare Beyoncé's monetary resources to those of someone working a regular job, it is likewise unproductive to compare one person's bodily resources to another's. The idealised 24 hours of Beyoncé's day exemplify, in a slightly caricatured way, the idea of shared, normative time. Where the Spoon theory concretises the unequal bodily resources between individuals, the concept of Crip time challenges the assumption that time itself is a homogeneous, equally shared resource.

Crip time is an approach that challenges the normative interpretation of time. It "recognises the fact that common expectations as to the time needed to perform a task are biased towards --- the minds and bodies of non-disabled people, whose oftentimes even idealised capabilities are set as the self-evident benchmark." (Umathum, 2023). This notion of the unrealistic expectations of people's capabilities and bodies is one of the core themes examined in this thesis.

In this chapter, I approach accessibility and Crip time within the context of the performing arts, and I investigate how Crip time has been implemented in this field. This is aims to bring the concepts of Crip time and accessibility closer to the topic of costume design.

2.1. Towards Accessible Performing Arts

Performing arts as a social construct assume some abilities and learnt behaviours from its audience members and performance makers. A traditional theatre piece is typically created as an audiovisual story for an audience who are expected to perceive the piece through both the senses of sight and hearing. This audience is also expected to be punctual, remain silent when appropriate, and clap when appropriate. Behind the scenes, the workload is notorious even for able-bodied artists. Nonverbalised expectations of able-bodiedness are embedded throughout the process, and if these expectations do not personally affect you, they are easy to overlook. How could we foster a wider consciousness of the disparities of these expectations? What would a theatre production look like if these expectations were questioned? Could a Crip-positive approach nurture a more sustainable working culture for all involved?

A common misconception is that disabilities and specific needs are always visible to others. This can lead to someone receiving unwanted attempts at aid, while another person may be forced to disclose personal medical documents for them to receive the bare accommodations they need. There seems to be a persistent expectation that one must explain or prove their needs to be taken seriously, especially if the reason is not outwardly and explicitly visible. A great stride towards a more accessible environment can be made simply by not making assumptions about dis/ability, based on outward appearances.

In discussing accessibility regarding art, the artistic value of accessibility must be considered. As art is not merely functional, neither should artistic accessibility be. In ensuring artistic integrity in all aspects of the performance, clear discussions need to be done on who can access the piece and how. These discussions can bring awareness to otherwise unnoticed expectations of the audience members' abilities as well as the expected abilities of coworkers.

One approach to creating more accessible theatre is by questioning which senses are expected of audience members. Sensorial theatre explores this question. In addition to visual and aural elements, sensorial theatre explores different haptic elements such as pressure, vibration, and the perception of heat. The sense of smell and taste can also be utilised.

Oily Cart, a sensory theatre company from the United Kingdom claims that by "treating every sense and way of experiencing the world with equal respect --- levels the playing field, giving audiences of different abilities and perspectives equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute." (Oily Cart, n.d.) Concrete Youth, a UK-based charity, creates multisensory performances that are "designed to meet the needs of [their] audience with PMLD[1]" (Concrete Youth, n.d.). In Finland, sensory theatre has been explored by Theatre Tuike, which specialises in non-visual theatre performances. In these, audience members are blindfolded and therefore encouraged to experience the performance through other sensory means, such as through the senses of touch, smell, hearing, taste, as well as sensations of hot, cold, vibration, and pressure. (Nissinen, 2022).

Adopting a sensorial approach instead of relying solely on audiovisual storytelling can encourage new ways of creation and interaction. Sensorial methodology may also give space to creatives who have found the traditional approaches to the performing arts inaccessible.

[1] Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities

2.2. The Necessity of Crip Time in the Context of Accessible Performing Arts

If we use the example of Beyoncé's 24 hours from earlier, we can understand how approaching time as an equal resource is not realistic. In the context of disability studies, Crip time has been used as a term to name various ways time can be approached, disrupted and rethought to fit various human experiences and needs. "Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (Kafer, 2013). This is not the most marketable approach in a society where profit and efficiency are highly valued. How can such a system encourage artistic exploration which cannot ensure profitability?

I know more theatre makers who are struggling, or have struggled, with overwork and burnout than I know who have not. When able-bodied people struggle to keep up with the expected pace, what does this suggest for disabled artists? A larger conversation is needed on the sustainability of all work effort, and to question the demand to perform at an intensity that is unrealistic for many. This expected intensity can be fully inaccessible for disabled artists, who struggle to present their input as valuable as that of their able-bodied coworkers'. Therefore, allowing for varied expressions of time and pace can help create more sustainable and accessible space. This is where the concept of Crip time can be used to foster healthier and more accessible and inclusive work environments.

Crip time can be explored across various aspects of theatre making, not the least in the performances themselves. Disrupted and flexible pacing of the performance can be the focal artistic point, as in *'Möchten Sie noch? Nein Danke!'* (2018), of which Umathum specifically notes "--- the asynchronicity of [the performer's] actions. Each of them needs their individual time to eat, drink, and talk. As a result, not only do we see different personalities gathered at the table, but also different temporalities, leading to never-ending delay and tardiness, requiring everybody to wait (patiently or not) and to mutually realign (with or without success)." (Umathum, 2023).

If applied in the work environment, Crip time can provide new ways to explore creative work, performance structure, or ensure that everyone can work sustainably. By being open to different rhythms, we may learn more functional methods than when we aim to do things in the ways "they are supposed to be done". Kate Marsh remarks in *'Crip Time and the Creative Process: Choreography and Performance as Sites for Exploring "Normative" and "Crip" Time and the Disabled Dance-Maker'* how "[f]itting our experiences and bodies into pre-defined ideas of time and space leads to a lack of authentic practice and an interruption to our creative processes" (Marsh, 2023). To then flip Marsh's argument, we could say "[releasing] our experiences and bodies [from] pre-defined ideas of time and space leads to a [more] authentic practice and [allows] our creative processes [to flow more freely]. (Marsh, 2023, square bracketed additions by me).

3. Accessibility in the context of costuming

Costuming is a field in which working with bodies is at the core (Sandoval, 2024). In the history of the performing arts, it has been a select few bodies that have been allowed on the stage to represent the human experience. Carrie Sandahl notes in *'Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance'*, how these bodies are expected to attain neutrality that can be then moulded and characterised by adding specific movement types or bodily elements to create characters (Sandahl, 2005). This can, for example, be padding to create an illusion of a differently shaped body, limping, or wearing glasses. True neutrality, while unattainable, is something that is expected of performers, consciously or not. Audience members have also been conditioned to expect anything deviating from this neutrality to be read as characterisation. As Robert McRuer (2006) argues, the presence of normality expects the existence of the other, the abnormal. Expecting neutrality and attaching anything that deviates from this expectation to characterisation creates a difficult situation, specifically for disabled performers. Their normal ways of existing are read as abnormal, as characterisations. This has led to disabled performers either being typecast to play a character who has their disability as a chosen characteristic or being excluded from the casting process altogether.

Through casting, performance makers search for a performer who embodies something they wish to see on stage. This 'something' may relate to the performer's identity or body, which characterises parts of the performer. There can also be expectations of transforming the performer into something outside/beyond themselves. Navigating between real embodied experiences and adding fictitious elements is where the costume designer must weave a character. While casting lies outside the costume designer's jurisdiction, it affects our work greatly. The performing body is both the canvas and the collaborator in our work. If we get to design costumes only for highly curated, "normative" bodies, our designs will inevitably support this normativity. There have been attempts at fighting such norms through costume, for example, using prosthetics, to give the idea of "abnormality" visually for the audience and haptically for the performer. This, unfortunately often falls under *crip drag,* in which an illusion of disability is created on a non-disabled body. As disability is being performed as a characterisation, "--- the performance of the able-bodied actor is usually as bombastic as a drag performance" (Siebers, 2008). While the intent of using disability as a costume may be to

diversify the bodies portrayed on stage, unfortunately, *crip drag* is often quite insulting. Disabled people cannot simply take off their disability at the end of the day; seeing able-bodied performers don a caricatured 'disability costume' is closer to minstrelsy than genuine representation.

As costume designers, we often thread the line of creating understandable and recognisable characters without relying on harmful stereotypes, working with the performing body and its characteristics. Relying on existing tropes needs to be done consciously and critically, particularly when they depend on the performers' bodily characteristics or assume physical traits of a(nother) minority group.

In this chapter, I examine costumed accessibility from two perspectives: accessible design for the audience members and the artistic collaborators. These two perspectives can conjoin in some aspects. For example, a well-thought-out costume dramaturgy can assist the performer to get into the character's skin and create visual accessibility for audiences.

3.1. Regarding audiences

Costumes are "a complex, dynamic entity consisting of four components: body, garment, action and context" (Lindgren, 2021). How are these components conveyed to the audiences?

In its most conventional form, costume design is understood as a visual medium. It is used to express inner and outer characteristics of the costumed character and place them into the world of the performance, to "engage the audience in a holistic visual understanding of the production being viewed" (Milam, 2017). This visual storytelling is intrinsically concerned with visual accessibility, for if the audience cannot understand what they are seeing (unless confusion is the desired effect), the design may be deemed unsuccessful in conveying the necessary information.

While visuality is traditionally considered an unspoken expectation, the other senses are considered complementary. Within this visuality, however, are implied haptic and other sensorial elements. A coat that looks heavy, a fisherman who looks like he smells of fish, a sweater that looks itchy. These visual elements can also be explored by other sensory means, even by erasing visuality altogether. Blind Theatre specialises in exploring these sensorial methods by inviting audiences "in a world without visual images, where the story is woven through sounds, aromas, textures, and tactile sensations" (Open Scene, 2024). Riina Nieminen explored the sensorial possibilities of costume designing for a Blind Theatre production in the chapter 'Costume Design Methodology Without Visuality',[2] in her master's thesis. Nieminen writes about creating characters through smells, sounds, and haptic elements in the production '*Proxima 8*' (2018), which was a fully non-visual experience, with audience members blindfolded for the duration of the performance. Creating nonvisual characters and creatures was a collaborative effort between the artistic collaborators, who tested different auditory costume elements and various scents, and collected the images that these evoked. Nieminen noted that shoes were one of the most important elements, since the audience members encountered the characters through the sound of their footsteps the most. When footsteps were meant not to be audible, performers wore wool socks (Nieminen, 2020).

[2] Translated from Finnish by myself, original title, 'Pukusuunnittelutyyli ilman visuaalisuutta'

3.2. Regarding Collaborators

Jorge Sandoval, in their article on costume pedagogy and gender inclusive practices, points out the importance of "understanding and respecting ---- bodies within the costume industry, and while learning the skills required for this profession —." (Sandoval, 2024). In this quote, Sandoval refers specifically to nonbinary bodies. I find Sandoval to be at the very root of how accessibility and diversity can be supported in costume design. Working with and learning from a variety of different bodily experiences creates a broader understanding of the body. As costume designers, we work consciously with the bodies and the people who inhabit them. Therefore, striving to understand our most important collaborator is of utmost importance.

As we costume designers work mostly with living people whose bodies we call our canvas, adept social skills are important. Costume fittings, specifically, are intimate and socially demanding processes. Suzanne Osmond delves into this aspect of costume creation in her chapter 'Fitting Threads: Embodied Conversations in the Costume Design Process,' noting that: "[the fitting room] is usually a small, enclosed space, where dressed and half-dressed bodies, unfinished garments, unresolved tensions and the rhizomic processes of artistic collaboration coalesce – generally in front of a full-length mirror – which further amplifies the intensity and complexity of the event." (Osmond, 2021). As Osmond also points out, costume designers and makers work in such proximity to the performer's body that such closeness is "usually associated with social relatedness and intimacy" (Osmond, 2021). Creating an understanding and non-judgmental environment is vital to fostering an inclusive and accessible space. A concrete example of this is conversing through the costume elements rather than the body. If a garment is ill-fitting, it should be adjusted by altering the garment, not implying the body is faulty. Therefore, it is only appropriate to note that *the garment does not look right*, instead of commenting that the body does not fit the garment correctly. Fostering an atmosphere where the performer can vocalise limitations, comfort levels, and needs fosters the collaborative relationship between the performing body and the costume designer. This approach can be called a *body-neutral* approach, which assigns neither positive nor negative connotations to bodily aspects, but instead welcomes the body as it is – as a collaborator of ours.

4. Case study: The TIKSI project and '*Livsfarligt på allvar!*' (2024)

The artistic portion of my thesis is the work I did with DuvTeatern, which hosted and led the TIKSI,[3] a performing arts development project (2023-2025) focused on artistic accessibility, as well as the theatre performance *'Livsfarligt på allvar! A hard-to-interpret murder mystery'* (2024), shortened thereafter into '*Livsfarligt',* which was created within the TIKSI project.

DuvTeatern, my primary collaborator in this production, is a theatre company based in Helsinki, Finland, that has been operating since 1999. Their ensemble consists of actors and theatre workers with and without disabilities, and the productions made by the company are always grounded in the ensemble's own experiences, ideas and interests, co-developed with other theatre groups, institutions and guest artists (DuvTeatern, n.d.). Other collaborators in this production included Uniarts Helsinki's Theatre Academy and Svenska Teatern, alongside hired freelancers.

TIKSI saw a network of performing arts professionals share and learn how to use accessibility as an artistic strategy and inspiration (DuvTeatern, n.d.). The project was spearheaded and administered by DuvTeatern. The members of the TIKSI network include Tampere Theatre, Svenska Teatern, Uniarts Helsinki's Theatre Academy, Pirkanmaan Tanssin Keskus, and Theatre NEO as of 2024. Tiksi is financially supported by the Kone Foundation, the City of Helsinki and the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland (Svenska kulturfonden) (DuvTeatern, n.d.). TIKSI's goal is to foster discussions and exploration on artistic accessibility, learn about how it could be done, and why it should be done.

The farcical story of *'Livsfarligt'* follows two sisters, Gunilla and Margareta. The sisters' elderly parents die, leaving two identical letters for each woman. When one of the letters goes missing, a series of misunderstandings ensue, ultimately leading to the involvement of both a murder-for-hire company and a detective bureau. The script of '*Livsfarligt*' plays with various ways of communication, and the misunderstandings that can arise from them. The farcical tone of the

[3] TIKSI, abbreviated from "Tillgänglighet som Konstnärlig Strategi och Inspiration", or in English: "Accessibility as an artistic strategy and inspiration." (www.duvteatern.fi, n.d.).

performance allows the audience to witness these blunders through humour. For example, when a deaf detective is asked to answer the telephone, audience members are invited to laugh at the absurdity of the situation. The performance premiered on 10.10.2024 on the Amos stage in Svenska Teatern, Helsinki, and travelled to Vaasa, Finland, for two additional shows in May of 2025.

'*Livsfarligt*' was directed by Mikaela Hasán and performed by actors from Duvteatern, alongside Swedish language acting students from Uniarts Helsinki, and external performers. The production was created and performed by people with and without disabilities, cognitive and physical, both on and off stage. The story and structure of '*Livsfarligt*' were created utilising devising[4] methods. As an artistic group, we experimented with ways to include information that would typically be only visual *or* auditory, to be attainable through both avenues equally. Focus was also given to the overall clarity of the text for cognitive accessibility.

In this chapter, I will expand on the TIKSI project as its participant and '*Livsfarligt*' as its costume designer. I share the workshops and research I facilitated utilising haptic and aural costuming methods and theorise on how these findings can be fruitful in creating accessible costuming, on and off the stage. In the last sections, I reflect on the final costume designs from the context of accessibility.

4.1. TIKSI and Learning Together

The focus of TIKSI was to offer space and resources to generate ideas on how to include accessibility as an artistically thought-out part of a whole theatre performance. The TIKSI network met in Tampere in October of 2023 to kick-start the project, and a closing meet-up is planned to be held in the autumn of 2025. The kick-start saw consultants on different accessibility needs and experiences give lectures at the event. Through video connection, Michèle Taylor and Amy Leach shared their backgrounds and approaches to accessibility in the performing arts. Michèle Taylor has a background as a disability equality trainer and consultant. Amy Leach, who at the event introduced herself as "not yet disabled", gave an inspiring and honest recounting of her journey

[4] "--- theatre that begins without a script. The script gets 'written' as the rehearsal process takes place through a series of improvisations and collaborations." (Garcia, 2013).

towards creatively accessible theatre. After recognising how an audio description in one of her performances lacked artistic value, she was inspired to research accessibility that is not only functional but also holds artistic value.

After the kick-start, TIKSI worked as a backbone for '*Livsfarligt*'. Throughout the creative process, artistic accessibility was researched, and the findings were shared with the TIKSI collaborators.

Learning about different perspectives on accessibility was an invaluable part of our learning process. Riikka Hänninen, Silva Belghiti, Ellen Hoang, and Ragnar Bengtström also worked as accessibility consultants for '*Livsfarligt*'. Belghiti and Hoang focused on deaf accessibility, while Bengström on the clarity of the text. Hänninen, our consultant on blind experience and perspective, held a workshop for the work group that stuck with me. In this workshop, we were instructed to close our eyes and mingle with one another within a classroom, moving around as much as possible. The goal was to offer a bodily experience that could imitate, to some extent, the experience of a blind person. During this exercise, Hänninen reminded us that, however we experienced this exercise, it could not fully replicate the experiences of blind people. This was an important point to underline, as I could open my eyes if I felt confused or unsure of my surroundings.

During the creative process, I organised workshops to explore accessibility in the context of costuming. I held an introductory costume day for DuvTeatern's actors, where I provided a hands-on experience of costume modification. With this exercise, I wished to show how anyone can make costumes and give the attendees the tools and the confidence to try. The other workshops I held focused on researching the auditory information present in costume elements. These workshops served as a learning tool for both myself and the working group.

4.2. Workshops and Experimentations

During the TIKSI process, I strived to explore approaches to accessibility in my costuming. One such approach involved hosting workshops on costumes, specifically considering accessibility. The first workshop was an introductory program where DuvTeatern's actors were invited to experiment with various garment modification techniques. The idea was both to introduce myself to DuvTeatern's performers and to provide them with a haptic experience of creating and modifying wearable elements. The day ended with a catwalk-style presentation of their works. By providing various modification tools, I aimed to give participants an equal opportunity to try different techniques, regardless of their prior experience, fine motor skills, or other potential variables. The second workshop aimed to explore the possibilities of the auditory dimensions of costume – what I refer to as 'aural costuming'. We arranged two different test days in collaboration with Riikka Hänninen, our consultant on blind audience experience, where I brought various clothing items and shoes to be tried out. A participant moved around the space wearing the chosen items without verbalising what they were, and Hänninen was asked to relay what she heard and what connotations the sounds evoked for her.

4.2.1. Costume Workshop as an Introduction

"Communal costumed experiences can be overwhelmingly positive, where the intersection of creativity, community and fun can help neutralize negative body-image issues while facilitating greater validation and social connectivity" (Joseph, Ferrero-Regis and Kerr, 2023)

I cherish anti-perfection as an anti-capitalist, Crip-positive, and human-positive approach to life, art, and work. In my introductory workshop, I wanted to share my love for creating by providing approachable costume and clothing modification techniques, without fear of "doing it wrong". So, I brought examples of how I have modified existing clothes to inspire playful creation. Figure 2 is one such example I presented at this workshop. This coat has been bleached, dyed, painted, stitched, and appliqued.

Figure 2. A heavily modified jacket, personal collection.

I had gathered various modification materials for the workshop, and DuvTeatern provided shirts in different colours from previous productions for our use. I aimed to provide tools for everyone to experiment with. As I knew some attendees had limited fine motor skills, I prepared stamps in different shapes: a paw print, a heart, a circle, dots and a crown. The crown shape ended up imagined as grass, which was the spirit of creativity I had wished for the workshop. I crafted the stamps from leftover foam and cardboard obtained from my cats' food boxes. I glued the shapes cut from the foam to the cardboard, bent into the shape of a staple. I chose the shape so the stamps could be easily grasped with two hands for stability. In addition to stamps and paint, I brought yarn, ribbons, needles with a large eye for ease of threading, fabric scissors, embroidery frames, beads, large sequins, and decorative chain. The employees at DuvTeatern also provided additional crafting supplies, such as fabric markers.

The day proved to be most fruitful. The performers created wonderful, unique modifications, with no two shirts looking alike. The excitement was palpable when I supported a performer's idea of cutting the sleeves off. Some performers focused on a smaller part of the garment, while others re-imagined the whole shirt. Every shirt was modelled by two DuvTeatern employees for the group at the end of the day.

My hope for the workshop was to bring a playful and experimental approach to costume making and invite everyone else to join in the play and experimentation with me. I was delighted by how excited everyone was to create something. I did not impose any creative restrictions on what they could or could not do with the materials provided, and I was pleasantly surprised by how the tools were utilised in ways I had not considered. Emphasising the process rather than the outcome gave the performers the freedom to experiment. This exploratory approach was at the very core of the TIKSI project. The following pages share photographs of the modified shirts created during the workshop.

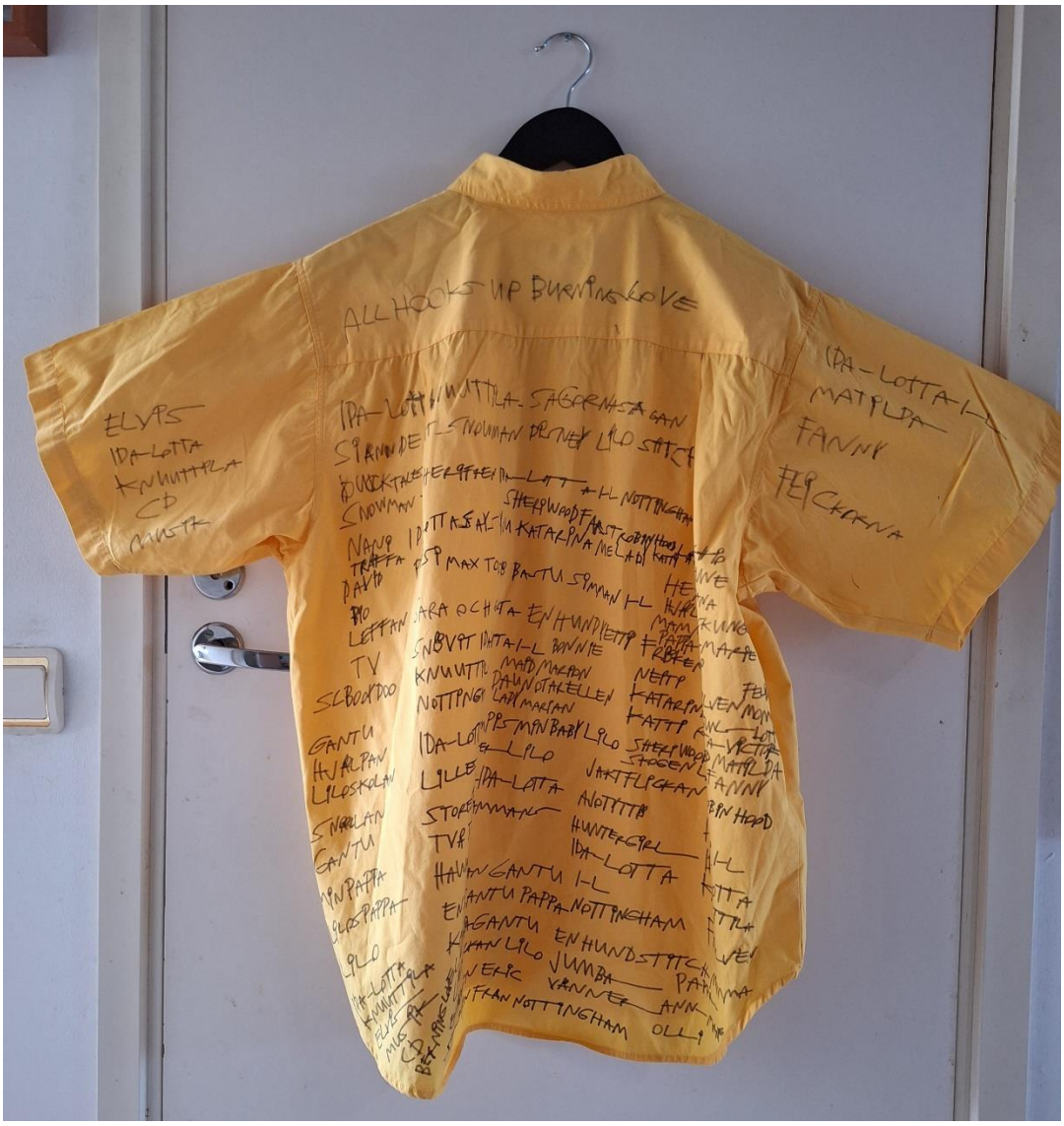

Figure 3. A performer chose a fabric marker to decorate the back of the shirt with text.

Figure 4 Texture and shapes created with beads and yarn.

Figure 5a. The front side of a shirt, with a minor painted detail and heavy modification

Figure 5b. The back side of a shirt, with painted and written detailing.

Figure 6. Dotted detailing with a high-contrast colour, with distressed detailing

Figure 7. Free-hand painting, stamps and sequins used in decorating the back and the nape of a shirt.

Figure 8. Some participants focused on the back of the shirt and some on the front. A wide range of modifying methods were used between the participants.

Figure 9. A design playing with symmetry.

Figure 10. A deconstructed approach.

4.2.2. ‘Aural Costume’ Experiments

Aural accessibility in costuming was something I began thinking about from the very start of the TIKSI project. Since costume design is such a visual medium, I asked myself: could I approach it equally through other senses? How would I approach auditory costuming in a project where visuality could not be disregarded in order to foreground aurality? I approached this topic during the TIKSI research phase by facilitating aural costume experiments with our consultant on blind audience experience, Riikka Hänninen, and my artistic collaborators. I hosted three different types of experiments on aural costuming in April 2024. All of them were held in an indoor theatre space with minimal external distractions. These experiments were recorded, and I will share the notes in the following Excel sheets.

The first test (Table 1) involved a randomly selected participant walking in a chosen pair of shoes with a variety of gaits. The shoes were assigned nonverbally, and the gait was not instructed. Hänninen was asked to relay freely what she heard during and after each pair of shoes had been tested. Each pair of shoes conveyed a substantial amount of auditory information.

Table 1

type of shoes worn	Notes from what Hänninen heard
crocs, soft plastic	flappy shoes
low quality, strappy metallic heels	cheap heels
quality heels, suede	more expensive, has status. Status was affected by the manner of walking
cowboy boots, leather	manly boots, like the "owner of Europe"
Long legged indoor slippers, thin leather	indoor slippers, leather
floppy indoor slippers, fabric	too large for the wearer, like they are about to fall off
running shoes, fabric	quite neutral, odorless, no strong character
bare feet	bare feet
hiking boots, leather	quite neutral, a bit of heel, leather. Outdoor shoes.

In the second test (Table 2), the director Hasán created a nonverbal scene, where person A was given indoor slippers and the key emotion of 'sadness'. Person B was given the cowboy boots and the key emotion of 'irritation'. Both A and B were given the task of packing boxes. Hänninen noted person A as reluctant and sad, while person B appeared angry and dominated the scene.

Table 2

type of shoes worn	notable action	Notes from what Hänninen heard
person A: floppy indoor slippers	person A: sad	person A: reluctancy, sad, no space
person B: cowboy boots	person B: irritated	person B: dominating the situation, angrier
	A and B: moving, filling up boxes	neither in a good mood

With the third test (Table 3), additional wearable elements were tested alongside the shoes. These items varied from leather coats and jean jackets to a raincoat and ski overalls. Hänninen noted having greater difficulty identifying the clothes by sound alone compared to the first test, with only shoes. However, certain items were more readily recognisable: The raincoat and the reflectors hanging from it, as was the rustling sound of the overalls. The latter also gave Hänninen the image of a mundane scenario, perhaps of someone running to catch the bus. A cane was also tested, which made the movement audibly strained.

Table 3

type of shoes worn	other worn elements	Notes from what Hänninen heard
cowboy boots, leather	leather jacket, oversized	”it’s a bit more difficult to decipher from these clothes, what manner of accessories there really are ” Hänninen 0:00:16
running shoes, fabric	ski overalls	outdoor overalls very recognisable, mundane, trying to make it in time for the bus
crocs, soft plastic	oversized raincoat with reflectors	maybe raincoat. Reflectors definitely
hiking boots, leather	jean battlejacket with trinkets	some accessories made sound, but difficult to say
floppy indoor slippers, fabric	walked with a cane	cane noticable, difficult of movement

Additional auditory tests were held during the creative process of *'Livsfarligt'*. Set and sound designers, director, producers, consultant Hänninen, and I tested shoes for Margareta and Gunilla with possible floor materials and hidden microphones. We found that the choice of floor material was imperative in either hiding or emphasising the sound of footsteps. Margareta's heels were easy to hear and produced a distinctive, fancy sound that matched their visual qualities. Finding a good pair for Gunilla proved more difficult, as I struggled to find a pair that was visually and aurally interesting, as well as character-appropriate.

In addition, we tested how sign language could be audible, as Hänninen had noted the wish to hear when signing was happening on stage. To this end, we tested various audible costume, makeup, and prop elements with the performer signing a test scene. The tested elements included long fake nails, a set of keys, and metallic jewellery. These tests did not provide plausible solutions for the audibility of signing. The fake nails would have needed more rehearsal time for the actor, and any resulting sound would have needed amplification with microphones. While the keys and jewellery did create sounds, they proved troublesome. As the actor could not hear how much sound was produced, the random noise at arbitrary intervals created a confusing soundscape.

4.2.3. Workshop-related Findings

Preliminary aural tests in a controlled space proved very fruitful. The auditory qualities of the shoes provided almost all the same information one might gather visually. Some even evoked an image of a character or a scenario. Running shoes sounded neutral, while cowboy boots gave a grandiose character. Hänninen could also easily distinguish cheap heels from a better-constructed pair based on sound alone. With clothing, the results varied more. Ski overalls and sneakers created a clear scenario for Hänninen, whereas the leather jacket was not discernible purely by sound. Additional challenges emerged when testing the soundscape of costume elements in a less controlled environment and with more than one actor walking across the stage. Hänninen noted a cacophony of sounds when most or all sixteen performers moved simultaneously in the space. This led me to focus on the possible auditory elements of just the two main sisters and be mindful of any excessive noise produced by costumes. With the sister's shoes, I encountered an issue when the visual and aural elements did not meet. Visually interesting shoe options for Gunilla did not create noticeable sound, and a more auditorily interesting pair was not visually compatible. As we were running out of time, we settled on a visually interesting pair of shoes that did not create any excess sound. Luckily, Margareta's elegant heels sounded as fancy as they looked.

Although the majority of costume auditory explorations did not extend beyond these tests and workshops, they still provided valuable insights for potential future projects.

4.3. Costumes of '*Livsfarligt på allvar!*'

The character roster of *'Livsfarligt'* was mainly composed of various choruses and small roles, between which the performers jumped in and out of throughout the performance. Vega Adsten and Karoliina Karanen, who played the two main sisters, were the only performers tied solely to their main roles. Below, in Table 4, I go over in a concise manner the main characters, the various choruses, as well as the minor characters and how I costumed them. The left column shows the character, or group of characters, and the right column a brief description of the costume design.

Table 4

Gunilla	A main character, the homely sister of Margareta. The costume included a green shirt dress, a green trench coat, grey shoes and a red wristwatch.
Margareta	The other main character, the worldly sister of Gunilla. Costumed in a purple draped dress, a purple trench coat with a white fox fur on the shoulders and red shoes.
Gunilla, childhood portrait	The main costume element was a knit strawberry beanie, added on top of a detective costume.
Margareta, childhood portrait	The main costume element was a knit blueberry beanie, added on top of a detective costume.

Chorus 1, Detectives	The main chorus, costumed in trench coats, fedoras, and menswear loosely dated to the 1940s. The main colours were various shades of grey. Three lead detectives were each signified with a colour: blue (Järvenpää), yellow (Jansson) and brick red (Lars). The trench coats had 'outline' detailing hand-stitched onto them.
Chorus 2, Grieving family	Detective costumes, but with black mourning hats for Swedish-speaking actors and black hairbands for sign language actors.
Chorus 3, Margareta's inner thoughts	Detective costumes with a less detailed version of Margareta's fox fur worn on their shoulders.
Chorus 4, Ghosts	Most of the chorus was costumed in the aforementioned detective costumes, but the 'outline' detailing on the costumes gave a different look under the UV lights used in ghost scenes. Two actors puppeteered life-sized skeletons and were costumed in black trench coats and gloves to hide the puppeteers in the shadows, giving space for the skeletons. One ghost was costumed in a black trench coat with white gloves, making their hands visible in the dark, as they had lines in Finnish sign language.

Chorus 5, The suspects (Bride, the bride's bride, the station guard, two coffee shop workers, two troublesome youths)	Various characters, all of whom had a red detail in their otherwise greyscale costumes.
Other characters (the elderly mother and father, a hospice worker, a murder-for-hire boss, her husband and her workplace lover, a priest, a cantor)	Costumed mainly in greyscale.

Leaving the auditory costuming for future projects, I had two main aims in my design work. The first was visual accessibility for audiences, and the second was bodily accessibility for the performers. The performance had a playful tone, which allowed for an equally playful approach to the costume design. When a performer transformed from a detective into a bride, adding a bride's veil was enough to signify this change of character. Clear and concise costume elements helped create visual and bodily accessibility for both audiences and performers. The following sections further unpack how this was implemented in '*Livsfarligt*'.

Figure 11. Nordström (left) and Simons (right) as the portrait of the elderly parents. Their greyscale costuming helps to blend the characters into the background.

4.3.1. Visual Accessibility

An important aspect to support audience accessibility was ensuring that the characters were visually readable. One should easily grasp the character's key traits at first glance. To achieve this, I sought inspiration from old comic books.

Skilful comic book artists harness colour, composition, and contrast to make the small panels readable. Colours can be used to make a certain character pop, such as the red-dressed woman and her red nails in Figure 12's last image. In the middle example of Figure 12, the man in a blue suit is coloured in red for dramatic effect when needed. These intentional visual accents of colour make for a visually interesting look. They also ensure that, despite the small scale, the reader can easily spot the main elements at first glance. Visual accessibility is also enforced by strong use of outlines and expressive linework typical for the medium.

Through the visual language of the comic books, even if one cannot see what is said in the speech bubbles pictured in Figure 12, the story beats can be followed through the visual storytelling. In the first comic pictured, the pony traverses into underground mines. The second shows a daily routine haunted by a mysterious figure. The last shows an exchange taking place. This deliberate use of colour and conscious visual detailing was something I strived for in my costume designs to highlight specific characters and important narrative elements. For audiences unfamiliar with Swedish, or for an audience member who may experience difficulties following storylines, drawing on the visual clarity of comic books could make the story more accessible. Through discussions with Hänninen, I also learned that many blind people still see some light and shadow, possibly some shapes and colours. Therefore, clear colour coding may also support visual accessibility for audience members with limited sight.

Figure 12. Comic books that served as an inspiration for visual accessibility.

Figure 13. Costume sketches of the two sisters. The actual body shapes of the performers were taken into consideration when drawing the designs.

The rough idea for the story and the main characters was locked in spring 2024. Through devising methods, key concepts and inspirations were brainstormed by DuvTeatern. “Film noir meets Donald Duck” was an early point of inspiration, and multiple scenes with themes of miscommunication were tested. From there, I sought to find the main characters: Gunilla, who was originally named Elisabet, played by Vega Adsten, and her sister Margareta, played by Karolina Karanen. Drawing from my comic book inspiration, I sought to give each of the sisters their signature colour that would follow them throughout the story. It was important that these colours were not repeated elsewhere, as I wanted to maintain readability by keeping the colour coding clear and consistent. I went through the colour circle, looking for opposite colours. Opposite colours would highlight the sisters’ opposite natures but also make their costumes visually distinct. Since Margareta was the sister who travelled the world while Gunilla stayed home, I imagined there to be some sense of jealousy. For a more yellowish green, which I chose for Gunilla,

the opposite colour on the wheel was purple. Through the perspective I have gained through costume history studies, purple reads to me as an expensive, upper-class colour. Therefore, green was appointed to the homely Gunilla, and purple for the fabulous, extrovert Margareta.

Figure 14. Green dress for Gunilla, purple for Margareta. The style of the dresses and materials chosen highlight the different natures of the two women.

Trench coats and fedoras were something the director wished for all performers to create the film noir aesthetic. These were all in greyscale colours. Gunilla and Margareta did not have fedoras, but they had trench coats in their signature green and purple colours, respectively, to fit the film noir inspiration (fig. 15). Margareta also wore a fox pelt on her shoulders to emphasise her glamorous appearance. While the rest of the cast wore mainly men's style dress shoes in black, Gunilla had frumpy grey health shoes, and Margareta wore red heels.

Figure 15. Gunilla and Margareta.

I wanted to ensure the sisters could be easily spotted in the crowd, regardless of the scene. To achieve this, I dressed the other characters mainly in greyscale costumes and avoided using green or purple anywhere else but to signify the sisters. Keeping Margareta recognisable was especially fun when she disguised herself. She wore her signature purple costume, but her hair and eyes were concealed with a stylish red scarf and large sunglasses. Within the context of the performance, she was in disguise. For the audience, however, she remained easily recognisable as Margareta. (Fig. 16.)

Figure 16. Margareta in disguise.

The colour coding of the sisters was also present in their childhood portraits at their parents' home. These portraits facilitated the sisters' dialogue in both spoken and signed language. The portrait of young Gunilla was portrayed by Silva Belghiti, while Ellen Hoang performed as young Margareta. These portraits recited the lines in Finland-Swedish sign language simultaneously with the spoken Swedish used by Adsten and Karanen. The portraits were imagined through large picture frames, in which Belghiti and Hoang performed, creating the illusion of moving and talking framed pictures.

To signify the portraits' young age, their costumes included knitted blueberry and strawberry beanies. These berry beanies were a strong signifier of childhood for me, and I chose them as a fast costume element to mark the transition into the childhood portrait. There is an old saying in Finnish: 'Oma maa mansikka, muu maa mustikka', roughly translating to 'one's own land is a strawberry, other lands are bilberry'. This saying comes from the fact that strawberries grew close to human settlements, while bilberries were found in the forest. I used this rhyme to assign the berry beanies: Gunilla stayed home (strawberry) and Margareta travelled away (bilberry).

The childhood portraits needed to have the signature green and purple associated with the sisters within them to maintain cohesive colour coding. I made sweaters in the sisters' green and purple for this reason. Unfortunately, these sweaters proved impractical to use, given the speed at which the performers, specifically Belghiti, had to switch from one character to another. I discussed the importance of the colour coding with set designer Milla Martikainen, and together we created the name plaques featuring the siblings' names and their signature green and purple. These were placed at the bottom of the picture frame. Unfortunately, when watching the performance from anywhere but the very front rows, these plaques were not very visible. Since they were the only colour pointers to signify the sisters, I wish they were more visible. In hindsight, I could have also investigated other means of implementing the colours for the portrait costumes more effectively.

Figure 17. Childhood sweaters in siblings' signature colours. Sweaters were dyed, front panels in a darker shade were sewn to create a visible base for sign language. Sleeves were also shortened to allow full gestures to be visible when talking. Sweaters had an open back to help costume changes be as fast as possible.

Figure 18. Childhood beanies and name plaques on signature colour-coded backgrounds.

Figure 19. Childhood Gunilla (Belghiti) in dialogue with present day Gunilla (Adsten).

An important element of accessibility in the costume designs was considering the needs of sign language and its readability against the performer's surroundings and costume. The hands needed a background that created contrast to enhance visibility; strong prints, textures, and reflective materials had to be avoided, as they could prove highly distracting for audience members trying to see what was being signed. The performers' sleeves needed to be short enough not to conceal any gestures. These choices can be seen on Belghiti's costume, as shown in Figures 19 and 20.

Figure 20. Left to right: Belghiti as Järvenpää, Tigerstedt as Lars Eriksson as Jansson. Note how Belghiti's' hands are more visible against her coat versus the lighter colour of Tigerstedt's coat.

While I mostly focused on the colour coding of the sisters, I also utilised it with the three main detectives: dark blue for Järvenpää (Belghiti), brick red for Lars (Tigerstedt) and yellow for Jansson (Eriksson) (Fig. 20). This was done to distinguish them from the other detectives, who were mainly in grayscale. Some visual inconsistencies did arise, however. Belghiti had to switch in and out of multiple small roles, without having the time to remove or cover the blue shirt of Järvenpää. The same applied to Eriksson, when Jansson's yellow tie and his signature sideburns were visible when Eriksson was performing a mournful aunt.

In addition to my use of colour, another comic book inspiration involved using outlines. This helped make details more discernible and created a cohesive look for the various trench coats. My assistant and I sew bias tape by hand onto the sleeves and lapels of all trench coats. Except for the main sisters' coats, all bias tape sewn was also painted with UV-reactive paint. With the limited time available for costume changes, given the fast pace of the performance, I sought easy solutions to signify the change of character. For instance, there were scenes featuring a ghostly chorus. In these scenes, there was no time for all the performers to change from their detective costumes into another outfit. The supernatural switch to a ghost was then made visible with UV light, causing the outlines of the costumes, painted with UV-reactive paint, to glow eerily (fig. 21). The ghost costumes originally included a black, see-through hood, also painted with the UV-reactive paint. This hood, however, had to be removed from the final costumes, due to bodily accessibility reasons, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Figure 21. Bias tape, painted with UV-reactive paint and sewn on the garments. The tape is not visible in regular lighting but emits a strong glow under UV. I also tested a hood with painted details, pictured on the right, which did not end up in the final designs.

Besides colour usage, I approached the visual clarity of the characters through straightforward costume elements. As there were multiple quick changes on and off the stage, there was no time for complex costume changes. Therefore, these quick costume changes needed to be concise and easy to grasp. A giant fur coat for the murder-for-hire boss, an apron for her homely husband, a priest's coat with a clerical collar, a bride's veil, all worked as easy-to-spot, visual character markers. The script also called for two troublemaking kids. To create their costume elements, I got to play with similar costume modification techniques as portrayed in Figure 2. As all the other characters wore neater costume elements, I drew inspiration from subcultures to create these punk-esque coats for the two troublemakers (fig. 22 and 23).

Figure 22. Jacket for the trouble-making youth A.

Figure 23. Jacket for the trouble-making youth B.

4.3.2. Bodily Accessibility

As discussed in Chapter 3, a significant portion of accessible costuming occurs offstage. Discussing each performer's boundaries and needs, as well as modifying costume items to fit properly to support the performer, are common aspects of costume making. However, the amount of time I should allocate for costume fittings in this specific production was something I needed to approach differently. I scheduled the first round of fittings to proceed at a tight pace, which was manageable only up to a certain point of the performance-making process. In *'Livsfarligt'*, I was confronted with how my expectations of trying on multiple items of clothing at a rapid pace were, for some performers, unrealistic. For the subsequent round of fittings, I adjusted the schedule to enable a slower pace. This change gave performers time to change in and out of garments at a more comfortable pace without rushing, and allowed me to test out more costume options.

The time required for dressing and undressing also applied to the final costume changes on stage. Some performers needed assistance with costume changes, while others required more time. This led me to simplify many costume items to accommodate smoother changes. The use of simple costume elements, mentioned in an earlier subchapter, that clearly and concisely indicated the wearer's character was beneficial for both performers and audiences. Another vital aspect of accessible costuming was the shoes. An example of this was the red heels worn by Margareta (Karanen). Karanen was not comfortable wearing actual heels, so I sought a pair that created the illusion, both visually and sonically, of high heels. The perfect pair had a classic pump shape with a hard sole that created the click-clack of a heel.

The bodily experience of wearing a costume could be highly distracting for some performers. For instance, for the ghostly chorus, a face covering, such as a black veil, was an element I wanted in the costume, in addition to the aforementioned UV-reactive bias tape detailing. However, the idea of using a face covering was rejected due to sensory sensitivities among the performers, who did not have sufficient time to acclimatise to the veil. Costume elements that performers might fidget with, such as buttons and loose strands of thread, could also divert attention from acting.

Figure 24. From left to right: Paasimäki, Donner, Haglund, Heins, Nordström and Karanen. Paasimäki as the murder-for-hire boss, Karanen as Margareta and the others as the chorus of Margareta’s thoughts.

5. Reflections

'Livsfarligt' provided me with hands-on experience of what accessible costuming could entail. Collaborating with accessibility consultants allowed us to address accessibility concerns raised by those directly affected. This was crucial for learning how to approach accessibility in *'Livsfarligt',* as well as in future productions. I consider this collaborative exploration to be the most significant aspect of our work. There was extensive collaborative effort that enabled the story to be as engaging as possible through sign language, plain language, and audio description, as well as through visual and auditory means. Regarding costuming, I relied heavily on the expertise of Belghiti and Hänninen to learn about designing for performers who use sign language, as well as the auditory elements of costume.

As the visual dramaturgy of costumes was something I was the most familiar with through my university studies, I took this opportunity to learn about other facets of accessible costuming. Sign languages are a visual communicational tool, and costumes can play a significant role in enhancing the language's visibility through adequate contrast between the background (usually a shirt) and the signing hands. As sign languages require movement, it is important to note that sleeves or other costume elements do not hide the hands at any point of the movement. Matte fabrics are preferable, as shiny elements can make it difficult to discern what is being said. The same applies to loud patterns and textures, as they may create a distracting visual backdrop.

I was highly interested in exploring the auditory aspects of costume, and the preliminary aural workshops with Hänninen fuelled this inspiration. However, it proved challenging to implement auditory costume elements in *'Livsfarligt'* without the soundscape becoming overly complex and, thus, overwhelming. This was especially problematic for audience members who relied on auditory storytelling, as redundant sounds risked muddying the narrative. An embodied auditory costume element that I was able to keep was Margareta's shoes. As Margareta's actress, Karanen, walked around, the click-clack of her shoes helped to pinpoint her presence on stage even when she had no lines. Other important costume details that could not be communicated aurally were incorporated into the script as straightforward descriptions and/or integrated as story beats. An example of

this integration is how it was noted that Margareta was wearing animal fur, through Gunilla mentioning her allergy to it. The script also verbally indicates what Margareta is doing (smoking a cigarette) and where they are (a memorial service).

“GUNILLA: Margareta, I don’t want to argue, but isn’t it highly rude to smoke here at the memorial service? What’s that you are wearing around your neck?

MARGARETA: This here?

GUNILLA: Yes.

MARGARETA: A fox.

GUNILLA: Fox fur? You know I am allergic to animal fur.”

(DuvTeatern and work group, 2024)

Through my collaboration with a diverse cast, I learned more about the individuality of fitting room encounters. The meeting between a costume designer and the performer in the fitting room can be a whirlwind of fabric, safety pins and bare skin, where a lot must be accomplished in a relatively short time. I was reminded how important it is not to assume everyone can switch in and out of costume pieces at the pace I might be accustomed to.

Haptic accessibility was primarily approached in terms of bodily accessibility concerning the performers. This was achieved by ensuring the performers were comfortable in their costumes and that no distracting elements were present. For audience members, an accessibility table was set up in the theatre foyer. The table featured items from the performance, such as a typewriter and a detective's hat. Information in plain language and braille was also provided,

enabling audience members to familiarise themselves with the story of the performance before and/or after the show. A tactile map of the performance space was additionally available.

At the beginning of the process, discussions had taken place about including a larger section for costumes, where audience members could learn about the main characters and choruses of *'Livsfarligt'*. However, this would have required significantly more resources and was therefore scaled back. The one costume element I did provide was the detective's fedora, selected for its distinct haptic features; the ribbon and the bow it twisted into, the wool felt, and the brim were all easily discernible by touch. The detective costumes played an essential role in visually establishing the setting, and the fedoras were a crucial part of this costume. Offering a "detective's hat" for the accessibility table gave audiences a compact, tactile element to touch and observe up close.

Crip time is a concept I only discovered after the production. In hindsight, I can see how it was integrated into some aspects of our production. For example, during the costume fittings, I allocated more time in the second round to address the various needs of the performers. This adjustment also allowed me to try out additional costume items in some instances. Another example of Crip time that was evident in the performance itself was how some performers required more time to complete a task on stage, and this time was provided without rushing them. This created a more flexible pace on stage, one that could stretch or contract according to the needs of the performers. Still, I wonder if we could have benefited from further integrating Crip time into our work. In reflecting on what I would have liked to explore further, I realised how many ideas were abandoned due to time constraints. Had the characters and the script been completed earlier in the process, I could have had the opportunity to refine the existing accessibility elements in my designs or develop new ones. For instance, I had wished to collaborate with the sound designer, Kristian Ekholm, to develop possible auditory costume elements. Unfortunately, this was something we had to postpone for a future project due to production time constraints.

This abandoning of ideas is, of course, a part of any artistic process. There simply is not enough time for everything, and choices need to be made. However, due to the amount of work I had in costuming all sixteen performers and their multiple

characters, much of which took place during fall 2024 before our premiere on 10.10.2024, meant that I did not have cognitive or bodily resources to see how to implement accessibility in the costumes further than the preliminary ideas. These personal resources were further diminished when I experienced an unexpected curveball of an MS relapse a week before our premiere.

For the most part, I am satisfied with the result and feel my work supported the production. There are, however, elements I find to have room for improvement through the power of hindsight. As colour coding was a strong visual means for enabling accessibility and enhancing storytelling, I wish I could have refined it further. An example of this is in the childhood portraits. Since the performers playing the childhood portraits did not end up wearing the colour-coded sweaters, I should have created the children's strawberry and blueberry beanies in the characters' colours. This would have colour-coded the portraits more clearly than just through the name plaques. Perhaps we could have also attempted to attach the sweaters to the frames. This, and other detailing, could have been improved with the benefit of more time and the opportunity for revision.

5.1. Accessibility regarding my disability

In the preliminary meetings with DuvTeatern, I discussed my illness and how it might unexpectedly affect my health status. During this process, DuvTeatern hired an assistant for me and an experienced mentor to help organise and manage the workload. The assistant, Meme Korhonen, helped me with modifying the costumes. As there were multiple garments in need of modification, Korhonen's assistance relieved my workload immensely. The mentor, Maria Rosenqvist, assisted in various ways. As an example, I could ask her to look for grey pants from the costume departments in either Uniarts or Svenska Teatern, log what sizes she could find and what needed to be sourced elsewhere. Helping me with this cognitive and manual labour meant that I could channel my physical and mental energy towards the costume designs themselves.

Rosenqvist also assisted by being an experienced set of eyes, I could volley ideas with and by focusing on the costumes when I could not be present. The latter was especially helpful in the final weeks when I experienced the MS relapse.

This relapse involved intense cortisone treatment, MRI scans, and visits to the neurologist. During this time, I could only attend rehearsals briefly, and on some days not at all, which was managed by having Rosenqvist present at my behest. I advised her about my designs and wishes, and she called after rehearsals to update me on what had happened that day.

I had kept a research journal throughout the process in the form of notebooks and sketchbooks. During the relapse, however, I did not have the energy to write. Using fine motor skills, such as writing by hand or typing, is something that I find increasingly difficult the worse my MS symptoms are. Stringing coherent thoughts is also far more difficult the more strained I am. This is where I found recording myself helpful to document my thoughts.

” It’s not fun being disabled (tired laughter), especially when it’s like… de-abilitating. But… Ninety pill treatment down, tasted like ass, and now hoping it will hit soon enough.” (recording extract, Craig, 2024)

In these audio recordings, despite the evident fatigue, I am also audibly relieved that I had verbalised my chronic illness with DuvTeatern, and even more relieved by how supportive they were and how they sought ways to help me. Admitting one's weaknesses in a workplace scenario can be frightening, as the fear of losing job opportunities is not unfounded. However, I feel lucky to say that my honesty was met with compassion and support.

5.2. Main Findings: Adopting a Crip-Positive Approach to Costuming

Elements of accessibility are always present in the costume designer's work. Modifying garments to fit the performing body, creating visually coherent characters, and ensuring the character arc is followable are facets every costume designer has worked with. The costume "is a material object that dresses the performing body and embodies ideas shaped through complex networks of collaboration, creativity and artistic work" (Pantouvaki and McNeil, 2020). Costumes have been described as "essential [in] creat[ing] the mood of the piece… it's the first thing the audience sees. You are giving them the prologue of what they should be feeling or thinking or imagining this piece to be" (Haskins, 2021). Costumes are a sum of the performing body, the context of the performance, and the garments curated, modified, and made to "bring a character to life. ---- Using clothes as context clues, the audience can know a character's personality before they say a single word." (Delligatti, 2021). Costume designers, through our craft, place the performing body into whatever time, place, status or reality the performance needs, noting the character's personality, the physical attributes of the body performing the character, and the energy given by the person acting as the character.

The visual storytelling power of costumes is undeniable. Beyond the visual dimension, the sound and feel of costumes are consciously or subconsciously considered during the design process as well. The sensory knowledge of costumes is there. By focusing on all sensorial elements of costuming and what each of them communicates, and to whom, we can create more accessible costumes. This creation can be aided by hiring accessibility consultants, who can foster a greater understanding of how to make one's work more accessible and inclusive, giving concrete points to focus on. This frees the artists from speculating regarding what might work and what might not, allowing them to use the tools provided by the consultant to make informed design decisions.

Understanding the ableist systems in place is essential when attempting to dismantle them. In hindsight, I noticed a contradiction between traditional theatre-making schedules and creating a piece about accessibility. The already full schedule of creating a theatre piece, combined with the additional work of

researching and implementing accessibility, demanded a lot from me and my artistic collaborators. I had verbalised my possible need for help, and in return, my collaborators and peers aided me the best they could, which I do not take for granted. The assistance I received ensured I could focus more on the design process. However, getting help to meet the level my colleagues were evidently struggling to maintain often felt like an uphill battle. I believe that having honest discussions about the production schedule can nurture a better shared understanding of the varied needs and limitations within a team. This honest discussion might involve artistic collaborators gathering to consider the individual and shared wishes, resources, needs and limits. The elements brought up, of course, need to be respected throughout the process. This can prove difficult even with the best of intentions if the artistic collaborators are, or are used to, working within a "normative" schedule and approach to time. Such a normative view of time assumes how people can and should use time as well as how much they should be willing to give of it.

Crip time can be utilised to promote a more flexible approach to scheduling and pacing. Jess Thom shares how a colleague of theirs had suggested a "socialist approach to energy", where the focus was to "pool [the shared] energy as a team and focus less on the number of hours each of us is expected to work. This gave [Thom] a concept that [they] could use to break down internalised prejudices about [their] body and [their] access requirements" (Thom, 2023). This socialist approach to energy and time requires all collaborators to trust the others to be giving their best. This best can, and will, look different between each person and may vary between days. Ensuring all parties are on the same page regarding shared deadlines and other important milestones agreed upon can create a robust base for healthy collaborative work, where time can be approached flexibly as a shared resource.

6. In Conclusion

“able-bodied status is always temporary, disability being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough” (McRuer, 2006).

Due to my disability, my 110% work effort appeared different to some of my artistic collaborators. Having only recently started to transition from university life to the professional world, I lacked the experience to articulate my needs and limitations early enough and specifically enough. This meant that some tasks in this project were undertaken by someone else who was at least as overworked as I was.
With some colleagues pushing themselves so hard, it felt difficult to admit needing to rest. Due to the MS relapse, I was forced to rest to recover. The neurological doctor assured me that I did not cause this by my actions, but did admit that stretched-out periods of over-exertion can emphasise symptoms. I found myself thinking of the tired people stretching themselves to meet the finish line, and how I stretched too. The work culture that surrounds us favours giving our all, all the time, without necessarily considering how each person's “all” can look very different to others, as noted in the Spoon theory. Simply put, constantly giving one’s all is not sustainable. Even when researching accessibility, in this sense, we had fallen into an inaccessible work culture.

Crip theory invites us to see the multitude of human experience and not just the societally acknowledged ‘normality’. As Robert McRuer verbalised it: “in contrast to an able-bodied culture that holds out the promise of a substantive (but paradoxically always elusive) ideal, Crip theory would resist delimiting the kinds of bodies and abilities that are acceptable or that will bring about change.” (McRuer, 2006).
Crip time likewise asks us to question the normative understanding of time.
Jess Thom notes how “most workplaces are built on unspoken normative expectations about the time and energy levels of their employees that take little or no account of individual well-being. --- staff who send emails late into the night are generally seen as being “committed” and “driven” rather than struggling with unmanageable workloads” (Thom, 2023). Unsustainable schedules and workloads can be a key reason for inaccessibility, as “not accounting for crip time and differentiated frameworks of pace and the time required to complete things means that disabled artists are consistently “falling out” or “falling short” of expected

timescales. “(Marsh, 2023). Having a Crip-positive approach to something, then, would mean allowing for the variety of human experience to be present without expecting it to fit into the “norm”, whatever that might be within the cultural context of the present time and place.

To work as a costume designer, one needs to have “an understanding of human behavior and the costume itself (which can include clothing, masks, makeup, and a variety of accessories)” (Delligatti, 2021). Maija Pekkanen notes in her foreword how “In our everyday work, we, costume designers, must change our point of view and find new ways to solve problems” (Pekkanen, 2020). Creating a believable costumed character requires extensive historical, contextual, material, and bodily knowledge. Therefore, I suggest that costume designers already have multiple tools for creating more accessible work. We may just need to shift our perspective, and here, accessibility consultants can help the most. Combining the (costume) designer's vast knowledge of their field with the consultant's expertise can bring inspiring results. It was through the combined work effort with our accessibility consultants and the artistic team that the costumes of *‘Livsfarligt’* were born. Through our work with Hänninen, we explored how much information the sound of shoes can reveal but also stayed mindful of the total soundscape of the performance. Belghiti shared concrete, costume-based ways to support the visibility of sign language on stage.

As costume designers, we do not design garments that a body is to be fitted into but rather costumes to fit the (performing) body. It is important to nurture a body-neutral approach between the costumers and the performers, especially in the fitting room. This body-neutrality welcomes all bodies and the people who inhabit them as collaborators. By welcoming a broad spectrum of bodily experiences, we help to build an inclusive, creative environment. Representing diverse bodily experiences on stage fosters an accessible space for audience members as well. Combining this body-neutrality with the findings on broader Crip-positive findings is how we can adopt a Crip-positive approach to costume design.

I see great potential in further exploring Crip-positive approaches to performing arts and costume design. Researching how costumes are present in audio descriptions and the possible collaboration between (costume) designers and audio description writers could help bridge the gap between the experience of audio description and the rest of the artistic work. Further examining the multisensoriality of costumes from an accessibility perspective could be highly beneficial for the field of costume design.

'Livsfarligt' as a performance was an important element of the research we did as an artistic group. Within the performance, we shared with audiences in Helsinki and Vaasa the fruits of our labour, what we had learned during the TIKSI process and brought into the spotlight experiences which are often not represented. Alongside the performance, a central part of this production was the research conducted by my collaborators and myself. Through this research, I hope to have watered seeds for a more inclusive and accessible future in the field of costume design. I believe nurturing accessibility through a Crip-positive lens would benefit us all, no matter if you are disabled or not yet disabled.

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