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Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Volume 36, Number 1, Fall  
2021, pp. 195-211 (Article)

Published by The University of Kansas, Department of Theatre and  
Dance

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/dtc.2021.0028>



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## Collaborating on Togetherness and Futurity in Disability Arts

**Kelsie Acton, Christiane Czymoch, Tony McCaffrey**

*Kelsie Acton, Christiane Czymoch, and Tony McCaffrey met online through the Performance and Disability Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research in July 2020. Over the past six months, we continued to discuss our very different disability arts contexts. But we found ourselves asking similar questions about being together. How can we be together? What are the dangers of togetherness? What is the future for disabled artists—all disabled people—in a world where the pandemic has heightened the threat a eugenic, ableist society poses for disabled people? We have no answers. What we instead offer is collaborative thinking in-process, drawing upon theorists such as Mingus (2017), Puar (2009), Yergeau (2017), Bowditch and Vissicaro (2017) and Māori concepts of koha (gift) and mana (honor, respect, right to personhood) as applied to performance. These conversations inform this annotated transcript. As access is an essential part of being together in disability culture, our transcript includes visual description and plain language summaries of each section of the conversation.*

**Keywords:** *disability arts, dance, togetherness, access, futurity*

*How can we be together?* This is the crucial question that emerged from dialogue between Christiane Czymoch, Kelsie Acton, and Tony McCaffrey during meetings of the Performance and Disability Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research that took place online in July 2020 in lieu of the annual IFTR conference in Galway, Ireland, which was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This dialogue between the three of us has continued in Zoom meetings over the past six months and these meetings provide the context for the annotated transcript that we offer as our contribution to this joint issue of the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* and *Global Performance Studies* on collaboration. The video from which this transcript was developed is hosted by *Global Performance Studies*. This annotated transcript of a single conversation between us is a snapshot. The dialogue continues and this transcript does not in any way stand as a final or definitive statement but as a midpoint in this ongoing discussion marking where we are right now. We think that the question *How can*

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*we be together?*<sup>2</sup> is a fundamental question for now and into the future for disability arts and, indeed, for performance in a much wider context. Mia Mingus writes of “the relentless isolation that disabled people endure.”<sup>3</sup> Disability arts often aims at addressing marginalized communities, creating connections and shared spaces, while taking diversity and the clashes that can occur between different forms of access into account.

Our discussion of the multiple ways we theorize togetherness engages a wide ranging theoretical framework, including Mingus’s access intimacy;<sup>4</sup> the performativity of ephemeral utopian moments as theorized by Bowditch and Vissicaro;<sup>5</sup> Muñoz’s aesthetic mappings of future social relations and the performativity of utopia as a “doing in futurity”;<sup>6</sup> nonefficient and sensitive communication as a means of political resistance according to Berardi;<sup>7</sup> the *kairos* of Yergeau’s autistic rhetoric<sup>8</sup> brought into contact with Lipari’s *akroasis*, or perceptual dance of attunement;<sup>9</sup> Puar’s conviviality,<sup>10</sup> meaning an encounter of bodies, in and across bodies, that offers a potential resistance both to the universalization of the human condition (that has historically excluded or erased disabled people) and to atomization into autonomous economic units; Manning’s approximation of proximity and theorization of neurodiversity;<sup>11</sup> and Māori concepts of *koha* (gift) and *mana* (honor, respect, right to personhood) as applied to performance.

One of the challenges of thinking together about disability arts is the variety and nuance of disability language. Throughout this introduction and our conversation, we often use the term *disabled people*, the language common in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and some disability activism in Canada and the United States. This language reflects the social model of disability that explains that people are disabled by inaccessible architecture, policies, and attitudes that exclude them from full participation in society.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere in this introduction and the video we use the language specific people and communities prefer for themselves.

We conceptualize being together not only as theatrical practice, but as the quotidian dance of mutual attunement, care, and responsibility that can take place between disabled and nondisabled people, between self and other within communities and beyond. Attunement, care, and responsibility are not unique to disabled people, but disability arts and cultures offer some of the most nuanced thinking on these concepts.

Being together also needs to take account of diverse and conflicting forms of access, temporality, and presence. How can we be together in the current global crisis in which our quotidian dances have been interrupted? To which extent can we resume or reshape these dances via virtual communication? At this moment of disruption, the future for disabled people, which is always under threat,<sup>13</sup> seems even more uncertain, and how we can be together is evolving, changing, and uncertain. While we do not directly address the multiple threats to disabled people, we want to acknowledge that we spoke and wrote against the backdrop of ableist violence

intensified by the pandemic, such as the do-not-resuscitate orders widely given to learning-disabled and autistic people in the United Kingdom,<sup>12</sup> the overwhelming number of deaths in care homes in Canada,<sup>13</sup> and the violent killings of care home residents in Potsdam.<sup>14</sup> We speak about art, futurity, and love because this last year has heightened the importance of finding ways of being together and imagining a future for disabled people.

This transcript, itself an access practice, also includes audio description and plain language summaries. Audio description is the practice of using words to represent the visual, providing access to blind, low vision, and neurodivergent people.<sup>15</sup> *Neurodivergent* refers to people whose brains function in ways that are outside societal definitions of normal.<sup>16</sup> Plain language is a way of writing that uses common vocabulary, short sentences, active voice, and attention to layout to make written documents more accessible to a wide range of people including, but not limited to, people reading in a language other than their native one and neurodivergent people, including intellectually disabled people.<sup>17</sup> The transcript is further enriched with annotations and provides further context to terms and theoretical approaches we refer to during the recorded conversation. By doing so, we hope to model diversities of access. Access is a crucial element in the being together between disabled and nondisabled people, but involves a complex process of negotiation, collaboration, and attunement.

Christiane Czymoch's research traces the intertwining of aesthetics and the political in theatre and performance, in the past focusing on British Live Art through a feminist perspective, currently following Vienna-based dancer and choreographer Michael Turinsky's work. She accompanied the rehearsal process for his performance *Reverberations* at Tanzquartier Vienna as a participant observer for four weeks in early 2018. Due to language clashes in the rehearsal space, a visceral or corporeal kind of communication seemed to develop, which became essential to the solidarization of the diverse nonnormative body minds involved in the performance. This observation initiated reflections on the performativity of utopia and led to further research questions about the rehearsal studio as a space for practicing alternative ways of being together, for finding structures of cooperation and collective creativity that circumnavigate theatrical as well as societal hierarchies more generally. Czymoch theorizes these efforts in creating collectivity as politically resistant within a powerful neoliberal framework that fetishizes individuality and independence while also allegedly incorporating more and more nonnormative subjects to further extend its reach.<sup>18</sup> The ephemerality of utopia contained in performative moments, according to Bowditch and Vissicaro, as well as Muñoz's performative "doing in futurity," provide the most important theoretical backdrop to this, with both approaches understanding the utopian as a fleeting manifestation in the present that works toward an alternative future, while dissecting and criticizing current societal structures.<sup>19</sup>

Kelsie Acton's dissertation research was done in collaboration with seven dancers/researchers from CRIPSiE, Edmonton's (Canada) integrated and disability dance company. This research used an arts-based participatory research method, where the dancers/researchers determined the focus of the inquiry and creative process and product is understood as a way of generating knowledge. Together, the dancers/researchers investigated access intimacy in the context of timing in dance rehearsals, specifically pace, unison movement, improvisation scores, and partnering. Access intimacy is an emotion, a good feeling of connection, ease, and embodiment that people can experience when their access needs are met. For the dancers/researchers, good dance was dance in which there was the possibility of experiencing access intimacy. Creating access intimacy depended on creating access to practices of timing that enabled the dancers/researchers to coordinate their movements and dance together.

Tony McCaffrey has worked for sixteen years as artistic director of Different Light Theatre, an ensemble of learning-disabled artists from Christchurch, New Zealand. Having presented self-devised performance both nationally and internationally, the company is currently engaged in finding ways to present their research that fully acknowledge the learning-disabled performers as artists and co-researchers. This involves ongoing online, studio, and stage work and contributions to books. McCaffrey has written about the work of learning-disabled companies such as Per.Art (Novi Sad, Serbia), Back to Back Theatre (Geelong, Australia), and Theater HORA (Zurich, Switzerland) in terms of stepping in and out of theatrical "good timing" and other disciplinary formations of genre and performance. He characterizes learning-disabled performance as a kind of braiding of *being together* and *being untogether*. Being untogether in pushing back against "the neurotypical presupposition that to do it alone, to do it individually, to do it at the pace of the volition-intentionality-agency triad, is to be truly human."<sup>20</sup> And, in a more general sense, being untogether as the untogetherness that is accepted, omitted, and worked around yet that still underpins conceptions and practices of aesthetic and political togetherness.

We all research in collaboration with disabled and otherwise marginalized artists. We are all interested and invested in the rehearsal process and how rehearsal processes raise questions of togetherness, access, presence, and practice. We are all interested in asking the same questions. Or rather, fruitful exchange grows out of our various perspectives, when we are asking different questions.

How can we be together without requiring us to be the same? How can we stay attuned to difference in collaboration? What does it mean to be together? What are the dangers of togetherness? Can togetherness be created over distance and online communication or does it require corporeal proximity? What is the future for disabled artists—all disabled people—in a world where the COVID-19 pandemic has made eugenic and ableist rhetoric commonplace? How can disabled

artists imagine futures that continue to resist eugenics and ableism, that continue to bring us together in imperfect, difficult, but joyous ways?

## Collaborating on Togetherness and Futurity in Disability Arts: Annotated Transcript

**Part One, 0:00–10:36: <https://vimeo.com/653521123>**

**[00:00–1:15—Audio self-descriptions of the authors]**

**Plain language summary:** We provide audio descriptions of ourselves. Audio description is when visual information is given in words, making it accessible for a wide range of people, including blind, low vision people, and neurodivergent people.

KELSIE: This is Kelsie, I am a white woman with dark brown hair. It's pulled back today. I have clear glasses on. And a black-and-white of herringboned pattern sweater. Behind me you can see white walls and a design poster that is in peach tones over my right shoulder.

CHRISTIANE: I'm Christiane, I'm a white woman in my mid-thirties. My dark blonde hair is tied up in a knot. And I'm wearing an off-white shirt with small black dots all over. Behind me, there's a white bookshelf with a few plants on top.

TONY: My name is Tony (laughs). I am an old white man. But I come in peace. I have a beard, quite a red face, I'm wearing headphones. There's white walls behind me. And...yes, I will do my best to smash the patriarchy, nonetheless.

κ + c: [soft laughter]

**[1:15–10:35 – Being together, access intimacy, physical communication, and sensitivity, being untogether, Per.Art's *Dis\_Sylphide*, being together over time; process and approximation]**

**Plain language summary:** We all have different ways of thinking about being together. Kelsie thinks about access intimacy, which is the good feeling of having access. Christiane thinks about the dancers in Michael Turinsky's *Reverberations* being sensitive to each other. Tony thinks about the time it takes for learning-disabled theatre companies to make performances. Tony shows a photo of *Dis\_Sylphide*, a show where the performers talk about how they made the show. We all care about how people make performance.

T: So, the first question we are going to discuss is what being together means for each of us and our work and study and performance. Would somebody like...

κ: I'll just jump in and break the awkward silence. So, I often think of being together through access intimacy. I think in part because working in my specific

disability dance community, we talk about access a lot. But also because I'm really interested in the affective dimension of access intimacy. So, before I, like, jump into that, access intimacy comes from Mia Mingus, who is writing...She's part of a group of folks thinking through disability justice out of the United States. So, she writes that access intimacy is "the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when all your access needs are [being] met."<sup>21</sup> Erm, so...and she also says that this description is partial. It's only a start of the thinking through of what access intimacy can be. Erm...so...I'm interested in this deeply affective way of being together, because I think being together is often felt. And I'm also interested in how Mingus describes the work of building and cultivating access intimacy. Because I think often being together is something we built. Or we build. Wow, tenses. It's not something we instantaneously have.

T: Christiane?

C: Erm, yeah, so...my way of thinking about being together mainly comes from the...from Michael Turinsky's rehearsals for *Reverberations*, which I accompanied. And erm...I realized that the people getting together there, the performers were a very different mixture of people. They had language, communication issues. Because two of them spoke English and one spoke mainly German. They developed a physical kind of communication that seemed to require a certain sensitivity for each other, that I felt created a sense of collectivity.<sup>22</sup> A way of being responsive and sensitive to...to...each other's impulses and needs. Which seems to connect a lot to access intimacy and to what Kelsie just said. Yes, so, my concept or my thinking about collectivity mainly comes from these rehearsals and from this empirical experience, I guess.<sup>23</sup>

T: I guess, when you asked me to think about being together, I'm thinking of sixteen years of trying to make and celebrate learning-disabled theatre and performance. And I'm still asking the same questions, which is: What is being held together in learning-disabled performance? What's coming together? What's coming undone? How does it come into being? What is in fact the being together of learning-disabled performance? And I think learning to work with, alongside, and for learning-disabled artists in theatre is really much more about process rather than performance. And it's about being together over time. All of the companies like Back to Back in Australia, Mind the Gap in the UK, Theater HORA in Zurich, Switzerland, have worked together over a long period of time. Time to make allowances for each other. And one meaning of being together is something that Dave Calvert and I have written about.<sup>24</sup> Which is Jasbir Puar's conviviality. Living together, almost. She says, I quote: "Conviviality does not lead to a politics of the universal or inclusive common nor an ethics of individuatedness. But rather, the futurity enabled through the open materiality of bodies as a place to meet."<sup>25</sup> There's a lot to take in there. But it connects with the conversations we have had together. I just wanted to add quickly, I also think that being together in the type

of performance I work in is about being untogether. So, being untogether as an autonomous individual, supposedly not needing support. If that's what a "together" person is. Erm, you know, there's a care and an allowance for the untogether. And then, untogether in the sense of the untogetherness that we accept or omit or work around in our togetherness. I've written about *kairos* and *akroasis* in learning-disabled performance, stepping in and out of theatrical time and good timing. Learning to listen people into performance.<sup>26</sup> I give an example of Per. Art's *Dis\_Sylphide*.<sup>27</sup> I'm going to share screen. This is from a performance called *Dis\_Sylphide*. Where untogetherness was a feature of the performance. We can see a number of people in different positions on stage. They are quoting or citing from a particular learning-disabled version of Pina Bausch's *Kontakthof*. And so, the performance was so interesting, because the performers were quoting from this performance and stepping in and out of that quotation. And talking about their experiences together in the making of the show. So, it was both in the good timing and the kind of virtuoso performance or a revisiting of the performance by Pina Bausch. And it was about the very different bodies and assemblage that the company makes in that performance. I'll stop sharing and stop talking.

The next question...

K: I'm interested in...

T: Yeah?

K: How process comes up for all of us so strongly. That the emphasis is there. Erm...and that, as Tony says, the being together over time is what's crucial. So perhaps, process in rehearsal is what enables that being together over time.

T: And learning how to be together, again, from listening to both of you talking about rehearsal processes, where people in all their diversity are coming together and having to fit themselves, do that dance of accommodation that we all talked about. Particularly what you were talking about, Christiane, in *Reverberations*.

C: Yeah, I...that's one of the major takeaways for me as well from all the conversations we've had before. That everything needs to be understood as process. Even when I'm talking about the term *collectivity*, that's only ever an approximation. It is never something that can be achieved as a state of being.<sup>28</sup> It is always a process, always a working-on. It is always a trying to get close to each other and separating and being untogether, as you say, Tony. And moving back and forth in this whole...erm...procedure. Yes.

T: And that connects with Erin Manning's work, what she calls "the approximation of proximity."<sup>29</sup> I think that's a really interesting phrase. And what Fred Moten calls in *The Undercommons* and elsewhere "fugitivity."<sup>30</sup> That there is this idea of being together, but it's transient, it's...it comes, it goes. It's not something that can be a solid state, like you say. You've also cleverly introduced us to the idea of collectivity. Christiane, perhaps you'd like to talk about that.



Part Two, 0:00–7:00: <https://vimeo.com/653525739>

[Collectivity, Michael Turinsky's *Reverberations*, disability aesthetics, physical and political movement, political affect, utopian impulse of disability arts]

**Plain language summary:** *Collectivity* can mean being together. But it has slightly different meanings for us because of the histories of where we live. Christiane shows a clip of *Reverberations* that shows collectivity through the performers doing similar movements and supporting one of the performers. Kelsie talks about how utopia is a wonderful future. But Christiane's work taught Kelsie that utopia is also a feeling. Tony says that there is a connection between the feelings, the movement, and politics. This connection is very important.

C: Yeah, I think I'd rather show a minute of *Reverberations*, of the performance, a sequence that maybe connects even more to access intimacy. But that also shows how... the rehearsal process produced a sense of collectivity, that very much shows this going back and forth between togetherness and untogetherness. So, let me see if I manage to do this.

VIDEO: [dub music playing]

C: The space is rather dark. There's only one light in the left-hand corner. Three performers are lined up in a row, kneeling, facing the audience. All three of them wear shiny-silvery trousers and gray tops with small reflecting rectangles on their shoulders. They stop circling their upper bodies. Slowly, the two performers on the outside slide over to the one in the middle. They put their arms under his shoulders and stand up together, slightly pushing him. He turns his head to the performer on the left, then to the one on the right, with a soft smile on his face. After stepping away from him, they all stand still, looking into the distance. *Reverberations* ripple through the performer's body in the middle.

VIDEO: [dub music playing]

C: With a dynamic step forward, they start swaying and twitching rhythmically.<sup>31</sup> Okay.

T: That's great.

C: Yeah, so... to me, this sequence shows an important quality of that collectivity I think about, as I just said. The performers are very different physically. And also when we take identity politics into the whole thing. But for that particular moment in performance, they are kind of united by adopting as well as adapting the physical qualities of the performer with cerebral palsy. That's the one in the middle. Disabled bodies are often made precarious by their environments, as we know. And instead of perpetuating this, the performers in this sequence share this physical quality as their aesthetic example. They take it and in synchronicity create beauty and passionate movement out of that. And at the same time, they

all incorporate this movement example into their own bodies. And change it due to their own physical qualities and their...erm, maybe not habits, but their own associations of movement they put together with this. And erm...for me, that's a great example taken from *Reverberations*. For that collectivity that also includes solidarity, in a sense.<sup>32</sup> And that shows a sensitivity to each other's...needs as well. Because there is this moment of getting up together, where you can see that there is a necessity for support in a way. But there is also a moment of directing...yeah, a moment of directing the situation, given by the performer in the middle. Because he's the one sending them off, after they've helped him up, with his looking at them. And giving a smile to say, that's the moment of parting. So, there's a lot of this all coming together in this one sequence.

T: [agreeing] Mmhmm.

C: Yeah.

T: And I think, sorry I'm jumping, it's very moving. And because it is about movement, I kind of...it comes back to things we were talking about before, the possibility of political movement as well as physical movement. And the affect of politics, the aspiration to the political of disability performance. Because it...it...It kind of positions itself to make, whoever observes or participates, part of that collective, part of that solidarity. Obviously, it's only temporary, it's ideal, it's beautiful. It's aesthetic, but it kind of perhaps opens up some political or affective politics as well.<sup>33</sup> I don't know.

K: I think...I may be jumping a little bit. But I think this connects to...these questions of futurity that we've been talking about all along. I think, one of the most exciting things for me, Christiane, when you were talking about the theoretical lens you work through. It's this idea that utopia, and I think utopia is always futurity, like we never arrive there, but we're always looking towards it. It's that idea that utopia can be felt. And it's transient. So, I think, erm...yeah, it's this way of framing the utopian impulse of disability arts, that I felt like was very useful. Because I often feel like there's tremendous pressure on disabled artists to...imagine the future. Imagining a more accessible, a better future within the space of performance. Where it's very hard to hold everyone together. Even for, you know, a brief space of performance or the space for rehearsal. So, the idea that utopia is inherently fleeting, kind of takes the pressure off of that.

C: Right, I just wanted to say, that's true, I never thought about it that way. That there's always also that pressure to be political. And never just...be. Or always...yeah, no.

**Part Three, 0:00–10:58: <https://vimeo.com/653527789>**

**[Labor, love, care and access, Different Light Theatre, Māori performance, CRIPSiE rehearsal sequence, unison movement, political movement]**

**Plain language summary:** Tony asks if care and disability performance is love or labor. Christiane and Kelsie say it is both. If disability performance is labor, then people can be paid and survive. But Tony has another way to look at it. He talks about Māori theatre. Māori are the people who already lived in New Zealand before white people came to the country. The Māori understand theatre as a gift they give each other. Kelsie shows a clip of dancers from CRIPSiE in rehearsal. She explains they put in a lot of work to learn to move together because moving together feels good.

T: I found a connection and you may disagree. I'm just going to do it. And that is, erm...the collective and something we were talking about was, that Kelsie has talked about, is labor as well. And it brings me to some questions like: Is it labor or creativity to make theatre? Is it labor or love or care to provide the kinds of access disabled people need in order to participate and contribute? I'm just going to share the screen. And I'm showing an image of Different Light Theatre in Christchurch, New Zealand.<sup>34</sup> And Glen Burrows is a performer with long hair and glasses on his head. In a motorized wheelchair with an iPad, being approached in various ways by three performers, Josie Noble, Andrew Dever, Matthew Phelan, who are coming in fact, to sing to him. The reason I am showing that image, and it's in black and white because it was part of a kind of rehearsal process, rather than a finished product. And the reason...I'm stopping the share now. The reason I'm showing that is because, in order for us at Different Light Theatre to make theatre and to work with Glen Burrows...There are many Glen Burrows, but Glen Burrows is a long-standing company member. He's a really joyous participant, he's a key figure in how the other performers learn to include. Erm, because, you know, that's part of why we exist as a company. So, it's necessary to find ways to include Glen who's the person with cerebral palsy, a motorized wheelchair user, who's not always clearly verbal. He's not always given a voice by speech synthesis programmes or Dynavox or iPad. So we have to find ways of working, traveling, and being with Glen. And for me it's still a question, is this labor? Is that a labor of love? Or does it not rather generate other possibilities for the kind of theatre, the kind of performance, the kind of being together we might make? That's a fairly obvious question. And I connect that to Māori theatre. And in the *whakapapa*, which means "the genealogy of Māori theatre," it took a long time for professional Māori theatre to develop in New Zealand. Because performance was always seen as a *koha*, a gift, part of a gift economy, not a monetized exchange economy. And labor was expected in the production of performance. But that labor was then offered as a gift to the tribe, the community, the audience, who would then respond to that performance with performances of their own. Such as *waiata*, meaning "song," or *haka*, meaning "highly charged movement." And invoked the place the performance

takes place in or the spirit or the *wairua* of that place.<sup>35</sup> It's all to do with increasing the *mana*, which is a difficult word to translate. And it comes into a lot of different Māori words.<sup>36</sup> But it vaguely means "honor" or "right to being of the people and where they stand." And so, it's a kind of different model of performance, which we kind of... I don't really know how to finish this sentence. But I think, it's about the fact that I don't want to say that we should do it for love. I don't want to say that disabled artists shouldn't be paid. But I want to say there is another dimension which is not economic. I'll shut up now.

C: But it is a really interesting aspect. Because I always think about theatrical labor, artistic labor, against that neoliberal backdrop. With this urge to make it obvious that it is labor. That artists need to be paid.

T: [laughing]

C: That people are living off this. But that's such an interesting different cultural perspective. Of course, it's different to put that into our framing, into the theatrical worlds that I come from, that I work with. Because people need to survive on what they do there. But this different cultural narrative of a giving and taking, just a different kind of theatrical communication...erm...turns it into a different question, is it labor or is it love? Because my tendency would always be to say it is both. It is always both and it needs to be both. As Kelsie said in one of our conversations before, which I find really interesting. Even access, even adjusting to other people's needs is always labor for everybody and needs to be recognized as such in general. That was a really...important thought for me that came from that, yeah.<sup>37</sup>

K: If I can, there's a couple of different threads for me there. Obviously, there's positionality. Like, towards the end of my PhD, I moved to London. The way I support myself is I do access work.<sup>38</sup> So very obviously, I am used to thinking about access as labor. That I exchange my time and expertise for money to live in one of the most expensive cities in the world. But I think I was also really directed to that understanding by the dancers/researchers I worked with on my dissertation project. So, I'm going to share...I'll give a brief introduction to the clip. I'll show the clip and then I'll talk about the labor here. So, we've got six people sitting around in a circle. On the left there's Bobman, an older white man. To his right is Iris, a white woman, short blonde-brown hair. She's using a powered wheelchair. To the right of Iris, lying on the ground, is Sara, who has dark hair and glasses. To Sara's right is Chris, a young white man. To Chris's right is Alexis, a slim white woman whose left arm ends without a hand. And then to Alexis's right in the circle is Sheena. We only see the back of Sheena's head. But Sheena is a white woman with short blonde hair. And at this moment in this clip, this is quite an early rehearsal in our process. We're exploring unison movement. And the group has been breathing together for several seconds. And then they're going to roll and contract and reach their arms up all together. I'll just show that.

VIDEO: [heavy breathing]

κ: And I'm going to pause. So...part of what we are thinking about that moment is that...difference, we don't want difference in the movement that we are creating together to only come from apparent disability. So, it's really important, for instance, Sara is lying on her stomach for that sequence. So, in many ways she has flipped the orientation that all the other dancers/researchers in the group are using. Which means, she also has to translate and adjust the movement. Erm...there's also, we talked a lot about the work of keeping track of everyone else and that attunement, I think, Tony and Christiane, you've talked about. And that attunement is work and skill. And there's also learning about other people. So, that practice of being together over time. And repeating these movements over and over and over through time lets you get better at syncing the movement with everyone else. Erm...and I think my answer is very similar to Christiane's. This is love. Like...I didn't want to explore unison movement, initially. Because it takes so much work to make it happen together. And in many ways, in dance it is such an elitist, virtuosic thing.

T: [agreeing] Mmhmm.

κ: But all of the dancers/researchers were very clear to me that we were going to explore unison movement because unison movement feels really good. And it feels wonderful to move with people. Erm...but there's all this labor to build all this love.

C: Maybe that combination of labor and love is exactly where political movement and physical and emotional movement come together in that sense.

κ: I want you to say more about that. Because I feel it, but my brain hasn't quite wrapped around it.

C: I don't think I can. That was just a...<sup>39</sup>

#### **Part Four, 0:00–10:41: <https://vimeo.com/653532439>**

**[Futurity, exclusion, Back to Back Theatre's *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*, flipping the script]**

**Plain language summary:** Tony asks about futurity, or possible futures. Christiane explains that society often imagines that disabled people won't exist in the future. Tony shows an image from Back to Back Theatre. In the performance the actors say to the audience, "In the future you will all be intellectually disabled." Kelsie and Christiane talk about how this sentence makes it clear that disabled people exist in the future. The phrase also welcomes nondisabled people into being disabled.

T: I guess, one sense of political movement is, that it is moving towards, I'm making a very clumsy segue, it's moving towards some kind of future. It's not content to stay the movement in the present. It's like, here comes the movement which will change, which will lead us to utopia, dystopia, whatever. So, I wonder

if, as a way of, kind of bringing this discussion to, not a close, but to kind of where we have to stop, whether we want to talk about futurity in this work. Because it's been mentioned a few times already. I think it would be interesting to kind of open that up now. If that's okay with you.

C: Yeah, it's just starting another very complex issue.

T: Sure, why not?

C: Futurity...just from my theoretical work, I realized that futurity is always extremely important in my work because it's deeply connected to erm...utopia, to every kind of political performance or political movement, as you just said. But at the same time, as Alison Kafer and José Esteban Muñoz remark, futurity is a concept that very often excludes a lot of people from the centre of society. With, for example, the idea that futurity as a very heteronormative concept, that is very often in the societal narrative thought through children, through procreation, through having the next generation we do things for.<sup>40</sup> The next generation that we want to solve the climate crisis for. Or whatever, it's always this next generation. And a lot of people are already excluded from that. And at the same time talking about a future that always, or very often when it comes to medical concepts and to that idea of progression, that disability automatically becomes excluded from an idea of the future.<sup>41</sup> And these are things that always need to be taken into account, I think, when we talk about futurity in general. Because it's a very loaded, a very freighted concept. But at the same time for every kind of political movement, every kind of political necessity, it's there. It's there in every utopian effort. As ephemeral as it may be.

T: [agreeing] Mmhmm.

C: Yeah, so, it's a bit of a...it's a very mixed, a very freighted term for...for us to use as well, for me to use.<sup>42</sup>

T: Can I speak now, Kelsie? Is that okay, to respond to that? I'm going to share an image of Back to Back Theatre from Geelong in Australia.<sup>43</sup> I'm showing an image of one, two, three, four, five performers, artists, who are standing at the front of the stage. Behind them there are some polystyrene blocks and chairs, a ladder, there's a screen up top which has got a caption on. White text on black background, saying: "They are not understanding us." Erm...and this is a company who have... they have a particular take on futurity, I think. They self-describe themselves on their website as "Back to Back aims to propose work that is not contemporary, but a work for the near future. It is simultaneously a contention, an allegation and an affirmation for human potential."<sup>44</sup> And in this...the image that the play comes from...the image that I'm showing comes from a play called *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*. In that performance, which was presented in Sydney and various places in America and then had to stop touring because of COVID, there's a direct address to the audience, the assumed abled audience, where the performers repeat the phrase "In the future you will all be intellectually disabled." And it's...I think...

you know, it's meant as a provocation, as that website says, "an allegation." But also "an affirmation" that, you know...with the development of AI and of robotics and various other technologies, we're almost in that stance of the posthuman now. Human is the intellectually disabled element in a logical, technologically advanced universe. And as we can see in political events, currently, the level of intellectual disability or the kind of denial of science, of reason, of all the eighteenth-century rational project, is kind of rampant in various countries. So, my guess, my point is, I think there are very positive ways of thinking. And this is learning-disabled artists' thinking, that in the future we will all be intellectually disabled. And that's not to create some kind of awful themed, essential..."intellectually disabled people are more empathetic or more emotional." But I think it's a coming to terms. A coming to terms with human limitation. And I think it has profound implications. It may not, you know, it may not sound very comfortable, but it is another, for me, sorry, it is another form of futurity.

Just as within each supposedly abled body is the disability to come. Or the disability we've emerged from as babies or whatever, needing all this support. And the disability to come in terms of physical deterioration, dementia, Alzheimer's, all these lovely things which may be in each of our futures.

[microphone rustles]

T: I'll just chuck that in. That's the kind of...I'm trying to balance very negative stereotypes of disability with some potential...possibilities, I think.

K: Yeah, it's...it's interesting, I think I'm having like a very inarticulate response. But I'll try and wrap some words around that.

T: Cool.

K: It's interesting, I feel, when you show me that work from Back to Back Theatre and I hear that phrase *In the future you will all be intellectually disabled*. For me...it's a provocation. I understand the provocation to an assumed nondisabled audience. But for me, I also hear echoes of what Christiane is getting at in referencing Kafer and Muñoz. And that sounds hopeful to me. Because we're imagining a future with disabled people in it.

T: [agreeing] Mmhmm.

K: That seems to me somewhat...in a way, I'm not sure I can articulate yet, somehow different from this idea of being temporarily able-bodied or temporary able-mindedness. Those ideas...there's often...I feel like the specter of the fear of disability exists within those ideas.

T: [agreeing] Mmhmm.

K: Rather than thinking about these natural changes that human beings experience in how they function at any point within their lives. That's not very articulate. I have nowhere to go with this thought.

T: No, it's wonderful. No, I think that's great.

C: What I like about this "In the future you will all be intellectually disabled"



is particularly with these difficult concepts of, or these problematic concepts of futurity that I just referred to, that this is flipping the script, as we said before. As you said, Tony. Particularly when we think about hegemonic structures in working together, and dominance, potential conflicts in that. There is this concept of futurity where all of a sudden the disabled people on stage are pulling nondisabled people into a futurity, into a concept of futurity. Saying that “you will...” “In the future we will all be intellectually...you will all be intellectually disabled.” And all of a sudden it’s not that idea of a future that is defined by nondisabled people. And where disability is to be excluded or eradicated, but it’s all turned upside down. And nondisabled people are kind of pulled into that idea of a future. That’s what I really like about this sentence, this performative moment.

### Notes

1. Mia Mingus, “The Missing Link,” *Leaving Evidence* (blog), May 5, 2011, <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link>.
2. Mingus, “The Missing Link.”
3. Rachel Bowditch and Pegge Vissicaro, ed., *Performing Utopia* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2017).
4. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
5. Franco Berardi, *Der Aufstand. Über Poesie und Finanzwesen* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2015).
6. M. Remi Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
7. Lisbeth Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being: Towards an Ethics of Attunement* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014).
- Lisbeth Lipari, “On Interlistening and the Idea of Dialogue,” *Theory and Psychology* 24, no. 4 (2014): 504–23.
8. Jasbir Puar, “Prognosis Time: Towards a Geopolitics of Affect, Debility and Capacity,” *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19 (July 2009): 161–72.
9. Erin Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Useless: Thought in the Act* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
10. Tom Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs* (London: Routledge, 2006).
11. Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
12. James Tipper, “Fury at ‘Do Not Resuscitate’ Notices Given to Covid Patients with Learning Disabilities,” *Guardian*, February 13, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/13/new-do-not-resuscitate-orders-imposed-on-covid-19-patients-with-learning-difficulties>.
13. Julie Ireton, “Canada’s Nursing Homes Have Worst Record for COVID-19 Deaths among Wealthy Nations: Report,” *CBC*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/canada-record-covid-19-deaths-wealthy-countries-cihi-1.5968749>.
14. “German Police Arrest Disability Hospital Worker over Deaths of Four People,” *Euronews*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/29/german-police-arrest-disability-hospital-worker-over-deaths-of-four-people>.
15. Joel Snyder, *The Visual Made Verbal* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2014).
16. Nick Walker, “Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions,” *Neurocosmopolitians*, <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>.
17. Sara Luterma, “Plain Language Translation of *Disability Visibility First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century*,” Disability Visibility Project, <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com>.
18. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
19. Bowditch and Vissicaro, *Performing Utopia*, 2; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 26–7.
20. Manning, *Pragmatics of the Useless*, 3.
21. Mingus, “The Missing Link.”



22. In the context of this rehearsal process, I understand collectivity as a way of being receptive and responsive to each other's impulses and needs. The core artistic team of *Reverberations* started with improvisations in which they led each other with the help of only one specific point of physical contact, giving impulses via this point that the other performers had to translate into movement. Further on in the process, they tried several corporeal practices such as Feldenkrais and counterbalancing, in which the performers' bodies depend on each other and their connectedness to create flowing movements or stable physical arrangements. This included becoming familiar with each other's corporeal specificities and developed further into a sensitivity for the body of the other that allowed for collective movement in deep connection that did not require immediate physical contact anymore.

23. In addition to the observation of the rehearsal process, there's also Franco Berardi's concept of sensitivity and corporeal connection as political resistance within neoliberal systems which influences this. Berardi claims that language and communication are forced to become more and more efficient in the semio-capitalist system, which creates capital only through the exchange of signs, completely disconnected from any tangible goods or physical labor, leaving neither the space for nor the necessity of ambiguity and interpretation in communication, thus excluding the body entirely from the realm of societal exchange. Against this backdrop, Berardi considers poetic language and the corporeal presence in communication as means of resistance against this enforced efficiency, containing the potential for social solidarity and a sensitivity between self and other that allows for surplus meaning and human connection.

See Berardi, *Der Aufstand*, 70, 120–1, 136. I see Berardi's theoretical approach reflected in the rehearsal processes for *Reverberations*, and Turinsky himself indicated directly that it influenced his work.

24. See Dave Calvert, "Convivial Theatre: Care and Debility in Collaborations between Non-Disabled and Learning-Disabled Theatre Makers," in *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, ed. Amanda Stuart Fisher and James Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 85–102; Tony McCaffrey, *Incapacity and Theatricality: Politics and Aesthetics in Theatre Involving Actors with Intellectual Disabilities* (London: Routledge, 2019), 124.

25. Puar, "Prognosis Time," 168.

26. Tony McCaffrey, "Kairos Reconfigured: The Rhetoric of Actors with Intellectual Disabilities Stepping In and Out of Theatrical Time," in *Out of Time?: Temporality in Disability Performance*, ed. Benjamin Wihstutz and Noa Winter (London: Routledge, forthcoming). See also Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being*; Lipari, "On Interlistening and the Idea of Dialogue"; Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*.

27. See Margaret Ames et al., "Responding to Per.Art's *Dis\_Sylphide*: Six Voices from IFTR's Performance and Disability Working Group," *Theatre Research International* 44, no. 1 (2019): 82–101.

28. For the ephemerality of utopia and concepts of "fleeting utopic landscapes" in momentary gatherings of subjects during public festivals and performance art, see Bowditch and Vissicaro, *Performing Utopia*, 6–7.

29. Manning, *Pragmatics of the Useless*, 3.

30. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013).

31. *Reverberations*, filmed March 2018 at Halle G, Tanzquartier, Vienna, Austria, 37:00.

32. In *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, Juana María Rodríguez shows that moments of traumatic experience caused by power structures in the past can be reclaimed and reappropriated by passionate, in her specific theory sexual, self-determined restaging in the present, reaching into a different future. Using the disabled body's dynamics as aesthetic example, thus reclaiming its beauty and artistic value, reflects the process Rodríguez suggests. See Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 21.

33. For "affect of politics," see, for example, McKelvey on "affective life of theory" in Patrick McKelvey, "Infected with Queerness, Or, You're So Performative You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 35, no. 2 (2021): 27–37.

34. Image taken from rehearsals for *The History of Different Light* devised by the company, directed by Tony McCaffrey, August 1–3, 2019. Christchurch Arts Festival, NASDA Theatre, Christchurch, New Zealand.

35. References to Māori theatre and the concepts of *whakapapa*, *koha*, *waiata*, *haka*, and *wairua* are based on an oral presentation given by Rangimoana Taylor at Ōtākou Marae at the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies Conference: "Turangawaewae: A Sense of Place," University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, June 30–July 3, 2008.

36. For one account of the implications of the concept of *mana*, see Rand T. Hazou, "Performing Manaaki and New Zealand Refugee Theatre," *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 23, no. 2 (2018): 228–41.

37. The three of us are talking about this from a very specific perspective we all share, which is looking at performance and theatre practice. Underlying all this, it is necessary to say, is the basic understanding that first and foremost, access for disabled people to all aspects of society is a basic human right, not a question of love. We all need to share the responsibility for and the labor of assuring accessibility and its further development on a daily basis.

38. "Access work" refers to a wide range of occupations and roles. In Kelsie's case, this often means the labor of providing access support such as plain language or Easy English documents, content notes, captioning, booking, and preparing other access providers such as sign language interpreters or audio describers and consulting with organizations and artists on improving their access.

39. Physically performing the mentioned kind of unison creates new cultural knowledge on a corporeal level, as Victor Turner suggests in *The Anthropology of Performance*. See Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 13. Furthermore, it is collective knowledge that's created. And this can be considered intrinsically political if it counters the dominant social rules and ideals that support or even fetishize individuality and so-called independence. For detailed reflections on the intertwining of neoliberalism, disability and resistance, see McRuer, *Crip Theory*.

40. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22.

41. Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip*, 2.

42. Kafer and Muñoz both emphasize that we need to imagine different kinds of futures, that we need to work with different concepts of futurity. Kafer speaks of a "politics of crip futurity, an insistence on thinking these imagined futures—and hence, these lived presences—differently." See Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip*, 3. While Muñoz identifies a "*doing in futurity*," a performing in the present, which is informed by a past that might be destructive or traumatic, to shake up current hegemonic structures, "propelled by a desire for futurity." See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 26, 30.

43. Image from *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*, devised by Back to Back Theatre, directed by Bruce Gladwin, September 28, 2019, Carriageworks, Sydney.

44. "About Us," Back to Back Theatre, <https://backtobacktheatre.com/about/about-us/>.