A Mobile Social Realm: Labour, Sovereignty, and Subjecthood in *Disabled Theater*

Affordance Creations of Disability Performance: Limits of a *Disabled Theater*

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This format juxtaposes two essays positioned side-by-side: Katie Zien (L) and Arseli Dokumaci (R). We are attempting to create a dialogue while retaining our respective voices, similarly to how the actors in Theatre HORA's Disabled Theater (hereafter DT) maintain a sense of individuality while coming together collectively in the environment of the piece. We hope that the reader can read in multiple directions, both down and across the page, as we traverse our disjointed duet. At certain moments connections may cohere across the columns; at other moments, chaos or cacophony might result.

While DT shares many qualities with the larger oeuvres of its contributing artists, the performance is a singular collaboration between the two entities. Likewise, our parallel writings. DT operates as a sort of free-floating "ship of state" – a traveling social realm with immense pedagogical potential. HORA actors perform a series of instructions, which were originally given by Jérôme Bel, and are now being translated/reenacted by the translator Chris Weinheimer onstage. The performance, with its methodical, task-based structure, also functions as a mobile laboratory, in which the actors repeat and replicate, like experimenters, and both performers and audience seek understanding through empirical means. The format might be said to tend toward the aleatory (not reaching it), and the formulaic is a prized aesthetic of Bel's. As part of our method, we aim to perform a similar affect, integrating "command" structures to evoke a clinical sense through the use of "Scene" breaks and scripting. We begin with some perfunctory stage directions.

Curtain up. Arseli and Katie walk onstage, sit in chairs facing each other. Arseli pours a glass of water from a nearby pitcher. Katie scratches a meandering itch. After a few moments, both turn to face the auditorium, as an offstage narrator commands them:

Scene 1:

Say how DT made you feel.

[KZ] Discomfort: Then and now

About five hours after I attended Theatre HORA's *Disabled Theatre,* I awakened in the middle of the night, **shaking** and on the verge of tears. Visceral waves of emotion composed my delayed response – deeply surprising, since I recalled enjoying myself during the performance. Now images, moments and events filtered in, wracking me with guilt, dismay, **mournfulness**. Words and thoughts that affected me lightly, superficially, a few hours earlier, now ached and ate at me.

One comment began to wear a hole into my memory: HORA actor Matthias Brücker mentioning that his family did not like the performance, that his sister cried in the car on the way back and said the cast reminded her of trained circus animals, scratching and picking their noses in front of the audience (Siegmund 22). Before, I dismissed his sister's sentiment as prudish, denying the cast of Theatre HORA their pleasure by worrying about their **respectability politics**. Now, my feelings seemed to echo hers. Ruing each moment of my laughter during the performance, I then worried about circumscribing my reaction. Why was I **policing myself**, or **closeting** the thoughts that galloped forth unbidden? Why was I trying to return to an ethical framework when the performance had ruptured such comfortable ideas? Why was this all about me? Could it be anything else?

As moments returned, I wondered –over resistance to such questions – what if my reception had been **'wrong'** (morally, ethically, politically, aesthetically)? What if my enjoyment was **coercive** and **insulting**? Even if it didn't seem so, even as the performers seemed to want to make us laugh – what if I was taking advantage of the performers by **laughing**? Who was taking pleasure in the performance, and how to

[AD] Discomfort: What kind of audience was I supposed to be?

I attended both performances of *Disabled Theatre* at Concordia. Having seen HORA perform before; having established the initial contact between HORA and Concordia; having witnessed the everyday labor behind the actual performance, there was no reason for me to feel any differently than I would when seeing any other performance[2]. And yet I was feeling different. Perhaps because of the whole controversy around the piece, perhaps because of **moral self-policing** I do, there was a feeling of **disquiet** that I could not avoid.

Throughout the first performance, I was extremely **aware** of my own viewing process, constantly overseeing my reactions, trying to make sure that I did not do anything disrespectful. I feared **laughing** lest my laughter unintentionally invoke an ableist response. I refrained from **clapping** in case this might not have been the response the actors sought or in case it might have sounded, in the description of Wallin (73), **paternalistic** and **patronizing**. Worst, I dreaded applauding because it would make me that "normate"[3] audience member who loses herself in ovation, cheers and tears at the sight of disabled actors whom she perceives to be triumphing over 'their'[4] disabilities. Whatever it was that I had qualms about, the discomfort was persistent. And it certainly was not due to the mere fact of watching actors who belong to a minority group that has been discriminated against, marginalized and suppressed throughout history. There was a particular politics of affect at stake here, making me ask: *What kind of an audience was I supposed to be?*

During the second night, I occupied a rather **'secure'** position. As the actors performed their solos, I accompanied them with applause in spite of the fear of embodying the normate-in-awe-of-the-disabled. What had

sanction this **pleasure** taken?

It seemed that something had been irreparably broken – a barrier of etiquette, perhaps? Which allowed for new freedoms? 'Un/knowing'– the impossibility of knowing or making meaning, therefore the freedom to un/know – wrestled with fear that I was **'othering'** the actors into the margins or beyond, into the primal and external, preverbal *jouissance* or clichéd abjection/grotesquerie, a common trap for "normates" (Garland-Thomson 8) interacting with cognitively disabled people.

These sanctions (in both senses of the word) seemed to emanate from the performance itself. Once we expressed such feelings, internally or openly, there seemed no way to retract them; they had such heft as performative speech acts do. We were forced to reckon with the clash of freed thoughts and speech-acts about dis/ability, the body, the self, virtuosity, and (yes) 'authenticity,' as well as a stubborn attachment to the 'real.' The real of the actors' spontaneity, not even undone by their memorization of scripted lines.

It seemed that "we" audience members passed through an invisible threshold into a place marked **'safe'** for the loosening of feelings, desires, and observations that many with purchase on normate status might ordinarily feel concerned about expressing publicly.₁ In this we were, of course, aided by the public privacy of performance viewing, making our bodies and minds into laboratories for thought experiments about the production – in keeping with its clinical structure and mechanical progression. Even in the intimacy of our anonymity, however, we were effectively trapped by *DT:* the performance's trap hinges on questions of the agency of the other – questions that the performance, with its emphases on authenticity and spontaneity (despite its scripting of seemingly 'natural' impulses), refused to deliver. How much of this was Bel's choreographic style, and how much the

changed between the two nights? Why was I, at least in my thoughts, acting from a more morally 'safe' place? After the first performance, a stay-late discussion was held with HORA actors, Giancarlo Marinucci and Chris Weinheimer helping with the translation. Even though the translations were in French and my French is lacking, I was later informed by a colleague that someone from the audience had asked the actors how they felt when people clapped or laughed, and the actors answered that they loved it because it showed their engagement. Here it was! The little piece of information I needed to be able to do things that I had previously abstained from for fear of being the insensitive kind of audience, an audience that sets itself above rather than engages fully with the actors and actions onstage. With whatever bodily tools I had at my disposal (clapping, cheering, foot-tapping), I joined the enthusiasm of the actors as well as the joyfulness of the audience member sitting to my left, who also happens to be the author of the article with which I am in dialogue here.

It was in the International Federation for Theatre Research's Performance and Disability **Work Group**, which she co-founded in 2012, that Yvonne Schmidt and I met in Santiago, Chile. A scholar of theatre and disability studies, Yvonne has been collaborating with Theater HORA over the course of several years, including their most recent (and quite exciting) practice-led research project "DisAbility on Stage" at the Zurich University of the Arts₅. During a visit to Zurich for a conference in May 2014 I had the chance, thanks to Yvonne, to see HORA perform at Fabriktheatre, a local experimental arts venue. Quite unlike what was to happen in a black box theatre in Montreal a year later, HORA collaborated with a local puppet theatre, das HELMI, without the 'interruption' of translation. When Yvonne and I met again a month later in Montreal, as part of the Performing Disability / Enabling Performance **Work Group** that took place within the 2014 Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics Encuentro, Yvonne told me about HORA's planned Canadian debut for following year in Toronto, and together with Ketty Ghnassia (HORA's producing

investment of HORA?

There *is* no way of knowing whether we were **'right' or 'wrong,'** or what that might mean, despite the performers' repeated assurances that they were enjoying themselves thoroughly, and their interest in eliciting a joyful response from us. There is no way to ascertain if the performers were truly in control of their bodies, or losing themselves slightly in the moment and intensifying the performance's **"risk"** (Siegmund 27-28; see also Umathum 112). According to Gerald Siegmund, *Disabled Theatre* "systematically destroys any kind of secure ground from which to differentiate between an appropriate or inappropriate representation of disabled people, between power…and powerlessness…between good or bad dancing, and, more importantly in the context of disability, between what is to be considered as abled or disabled." (30) Moving from Siegmund's "de(con)struction," I feel that *Disabled Theatre* continually builds up and erodes distinct modes of evaluation. The destruction is not 'systematic' so much as an oscillating quest for a point of **fixity**, and a continual unmooring, thus also proffering a continual re-embarcation. Our extremes of response, from pleasure to anguish, open up **a gap** (*écart*) that deserves further probing. Reflecting on this gap reminds me of a comment made by a friend who is a performance artist, after we left the theatre space. She said something like: "I'm not feeling anything. Which is not the absence of feeling. Rather, I have so many conflicting feelings that I don't know which to feel." At the time, I found her comment inscrutable. I now understand it.

manager), we began exploring the possibilities of extending their visit to Montreal – a process that was expedited by the conditions of the travel funding that HORA was expecting to get, which required them to organize a tour in Canada.

This very Encuentro, during which a collegial dialogue would spark the entire process leading to HORA's Montreal debut, provided the occasion for other **contingencies** that would over time relate to HORA's performance in Montreal. Our **work group**, which was composed of creative and critical performance scholars, artists and local disability activists, had staged an **intervention** at an inaccessible festival venue. [6] The ripple effects of the protest were more far-reaching than its immediate context. Performance as critical intervention into public life has enabled a growing sensitivity and awareness around the issue of access to arts and public spaces in Montreal – an issue which is further aggravated by heritage conservation codes that usually interfere with accessibility solutions, the city's harsh winter conditions, its uneven geography, inaccessible subway stations and oftentimes disabling public places, events and organizations. The powerful synergy of our work group during Encuentro and its entanglement of the local realities of Montreal have further convinced us of the pressing need for a permanently-based working group in Montreal – a need that has already been recognized within Concordia in its newly approved Critical Disability Studies Work Group (CDSWG). Through joint intra-departmental efforts, led by Kim Sawchuk, we held the first meeting of our CDSWG in September 2014, a few months following the Encuentro.

As it turned out, the search for ways of expanding HORA's Canadian debut to Montreal has coincided with the readiness of a newly emerging work group to host events and to increase the visibility of disability within the terribly disabling city of Montreal. As I will explain in detail below, an ardent process of organization has emerged: both on HORA's and on CDSWG's ends, members and staff of both organizations have

worked diligently and **collaboratively** across continents.

A dialogue that began as part of a work group three years ago in Chile has continued to grow and expand throughout the course of other work groups, conferences and festivals to take place around the world, and in the end of a series of chance "encuentros", emergent formations, institutionally-mediated situations and collective endeavors, *Disabled Theater* made its opening night in Montreal. And as such began **another dialogue…**

Scene 2:
Put these responses in dialogue.

Our essays, though individually written, emerged out of a collaborative thinking process, which we initiated after attending the Montreal debut of *Disabled Theatre* in March 2015. As part of its first Canadian tour, Theatre HORA was invited to perform at Concordia University by Concordia's newly founded Critical Disability Studies Work Group (CDSWG). Two performances were held (one with French translation of the actors' Swiss German, and the other English) Members of the CDSWG were present at both, along with a diverse Montreal community. Performances were offered free of charge, with a suggested donation, all profits to be given to the HORA actors.[7] A black box theatre, in a **wheelchair-accessible** building, was chosen as the performance venue. **LSQ** (French) and **ASL** (American English) sign language interpretation was provided for both nights upon request, and there were volunteers to provide **audio-description** assistance to blind and partially sighted audience members.

Since 2012, *Disabled Theater* has toured internationally for over 100 performances, visiting cities throughout Europe and the States. More than four years since its debut, *DT* has consistently generated controversy, ranging from fascination to acute criticism. Leaving aside

the full range of these polemics, we focus here on a specific localized context of reception of *DT* as, what Zien proposes to call, **"a mobile social realm".** Within the framework of a newly emerging work group, our joint claim is that *DT* has taken on **a social function.** Moreover, in spite of (and perhaps because of) its attendant controversies, it has helped to legitimize the formation of the CDSWG, which seeks to contribute in productive ways to ongoing debates over disability access and rights. Both of our essays depart from the particular position of having seen the piece in Montreal, and in light of the above-summarized chain of events. Rather than dramaturges or performance scholars, we write chiefly as critical audience members.

One of us identifies as **able-bodied** and the other as **a disabled** person (despite the lack of a visual marker to identify her as such). However, we are **both neurotypical** individuals and write in an academic, jargon-laden language that may well be inaccessible to the co-creators of the piece we're theorizing. We apologize in advance to anyone impacted by this barrier and welcome suggestions for improved clarity. Also, one of us (➔) has more knowledge of what went on behind the scenes of *Disabled Theatre,* but we are both circumscribing our knowledge as 'critical audience members' rather than critics with privileged information.

As critical audience members, we are accepting **our limitations**. We are not embroiled in the work's politics of reception across several performance sites. But in fact, our epistemological limitations can provide a useful site for autoethnography: rather than acting as scholars who seek to decipher and 'decode' a performance for the (presumably) unknowing audiences, we are trying to trouble the distinction between 'amateur' theatregoer and 'professional' critic by working as much from what we *know* about the production as from *what we do not and cannot know*. Because we are interested in the idea of **"un/knowing"** generally, we are actively acknowledging the limitations of our

knowledge.

Our knowledge is circumscribed within what we witnessed and researched subsequently – during which we came to realize just how polarized reception of *DT* has been. Further, *DT* has been the subject of substantial academic writing. Leon Hilton has focused, for example, on *DT's* blunt style of presentation and its import, pointing at the same time to the perils of **exoticizing** cognitive disability on the basis of a presumed direct access to "the here and now" of performance (2014). Petra Kuppers, embarking on an autoethnographic "art tourist journey" (36), has taken *DT* as her point of departure in order to reflect, more generally, on the complex, multi-layered and politically engaging ways disabled artists can and do appear "in the **nondisabled mainstream**" (2014). The volume *Disabled Theatre* edited by Sandra Umathum and Benjamin Wihstutz has brought multiple approaches into the work, ranging from spectatorial critique to behind-the-scenes production analysis with both Bel and HORA. These texts treat a range of issues, including power relations inherent to theatre, (re)presentation of disability on stage, subjectivity, presence, authenticity, and emancipation in theatre as they relate to and get challenged by disabled performers.

We are hoping that conversing in this way can offer a different model for thinking collaboration. In discussing a performance in which retaining individuality is a matter of a collective interest, we thought of engaging in a performative duet, in the hope of evoking *DT's* collaborative mode. We write as we speak about the work: with two voices, individualized and distinct but nonetheless committed to dialogue. We do not seek to temper and consolidate our voices into a uniform text. We desire to create texts-in-conversation, **an epistemological dialogue**, so to say. Through highlighted keywords and scenes/commands, we are seeking to stimulate the production of internal counterrhythms in the text, to let the reader travel through

the two commentaries in their own way.

Perhaps this structure will further open up the work, taking *DT* away from its polarized reception. It is our ultimate hope that in the encounters between the themes that we have chosen (and the keywords that we have highlighted) lie techniques and approaches for better understanding relationships between disability and performance, both **onstage** and in **everyday life**. We feel that this modality is well-suited to the structure of *DT*. The convergence of these brilliant artists, ephemeral though it was, created a **transformative** event, and we hope to invoke the sense of openness and possibility of their collaboration through the form and content of our co-writing project.

Through our dialogue we hope to decentre and distribute academic writing into a series of flexibly ordered 'notes toward a thesis'. If these notes subscribe to a common thesis, it would be the aesthetics of affective discomfort. Affective discomfort led us to want to write about *DT*. We are not writing to escape or rationalize our discomfort. We are, in fact, writing to *remain with(in)* discomfort as a productive affective-epistemological site, in regard both to the performance practice of Jérôme Bel and to Theater HORA's ongoing engagements with performance and disability. This means that we accept and draw upon our feelings as resources rather than discarding them.

Scene 3:

Talk about ethical dimensions of *DT*.

[KZ] Ethics

DT is built on an ethical dilemma, in which its aesthetic intervention pivots on the knowing exploitation of cognitively disabled actors. **Ethical liminality** is key to its aesthetic interventions. The piece exposes the interpenetration of aesthetic and technical virtuosity in a performing arts climate subjected to the capitalist achievement principle. As such, the performance asks audiences to grapple with the fact that it is taking an ethical risk for an important aesthetic outcome (Scott Wallin also makes mention of such 'risk,' finding it offensive; see Wallin 61-80, in Umathum and Wihstutz). The piece is political because it destroys a stable point of aesthetic judgment (Siegmund); the piece inculcates a strange semblance of **'participation'** (through the beginning interlocking gazes) that is in fact a **trick** – in fact confounding the participatory impulse, because whether audiences celebrate or condemn the actors, there remains a trace of uncertainty and **indeterminacy** about what we are celebrating/condemning.[8] Audiences are effectively placed into uncomfortable positions, but this is part of Bel's interest: enforcing judgment and knowledge-acquisition (**meaning making**, epistemological) efforts while also forcing their suspension. Our desires to know confront the impossibility of their fulfillment. To suspend the desire to know – to exist in a space of suspended judgment and unknowing: this is what Bel's practice asks, but it becomes challenging in a different way in Bel's encounter with cognitively disabled professional actors.

[AD] Ethics: The *agency* that we take for granted

The day after the second performance, I woke up to my fellow audience member Katie Zien's post, saying she was regretting her applause and cheers terribly. Her candid confession was my initial discomfort incarnate. The fear of being offensive had, in her words, turned into **a guilt** of having committed an offense, an absolute **wrongdoing**. This made me wonder: *By what 'laws'* does an enthusiastic audience reaction count as an 'offense'? If an audience member thinks that cognitively disabled people[9], by way of 'their' impairments, are vulnerable and open to exploitation, and in applauding this piece believes she or he approves of one such exploitation, then is she or he not assuming that disabled people, by virtue of a 'lack' of agency, cannot protect themselves and thus need others' protection and moral policing against any possible exploitation? Who, then, is the audience member who assumes that? Furthermore, in presuming that the performers are being abused and they 'lack' the agency to prevent that from happening, what kind of *agency* does an audience member who responds in these ways take for granted?[10]

When one is drawn into an ethical dilemma fed by particular presumptions, a certain normativity comes about. To blame a piece or its director for not having represented disability in a politically just manner without at the same time being non-normative oneself is a hard balance to maintain. In fact, this paradoxical situation, according to some reviews (see Umathum), is exactly what the piece is getting at. Instead of sparing the audience's moral relief, *DT* "provokes uncertainties by refusing to serve as a representative example of a performance that involves cognitively disabled people in a politically correct manner" (Umathum 109). I would agree and further this point by clarifying the paradox: the audience, faced with the scoring and setup of the piece, cannot readily and without hesitation appreciate what

is taking place onstage without at the same time feeling guilty about having becoming complicit in what appears to be a morally questionable framing of disability. Further, they also cannot easily criticize this framing without falling into the trap of setting the rules of an ethically 'proper' theatre with disabled actors.

Ethics, Alan Read writes, "not only raises questions of normative conduct and lawful behaviour, it also traces out the possibility of its own shadow, the negation of and defiance of norms." (89-90) This is from where, he argues, "an ethics of performance" emerges (90). It does not pin down rights and wrongs. It does not provide us with a "conceptual anchor"; to the contrary, it remains as "a possibility without closure, like the ethical relation which awaits creation" (90). *DT*, I believe, is after a similar kind of opening without fixtures. The betwixt-and-between situation it generates, rather than being merely amoral, produces *awareness of an abyss* of conceptual anchors. This all comes at a high cost, however, for, within its score, setup and dramaturgy, the piece can maintain an ethics of performance (in the way Read describes it) only by putting disability ethics at **risk**. As I shall argue throughout the text, this is but one of many high-risk experiments undertaken in the piece.

Scene 4:

Breakout sessions: do your own thing.

Act 'natural…'

[KZ]Against the performance principle

Even though the HORA actors are repeating lines accurately and rehearsing rigorously, they are not performing with the goal of achieving a benchmark of virtuosity, as Wihstutz and several others note.[11] Rather, their performance "question[s] the principle of performance as achievement that extends across all areas of commercialized society." (Wihstutz 44) Where other cognitively disabled theatre companies may, arguably, strive to show that "even [cognitively disabled people] are capable of doing things" and achieving a standard of "good theatre," *DT* abandons this sort of desire for a display of **achievement**, **virtuosity**, and **efficacy** (Wihstutz 44). HORA, rather, makes a space for people with disabilities, not only to make their own time and place – their own coordinates of ethics, aesthetics, sociality, politics – but to enfold the audience into that space, as **an alternative state** (this word used purposefully), potentially productive of new relationships and ways of seeing, being, and reflecting. See, for example, Dokumaci's discussion below of affordances as creating novel choreographies of relationality and intersubjectivity in diverse spaces. Arguably, however, this is not entirely emancipatory (as Wihstutz claims) or equal (as Siegmund does), because the audience is continually returned to the strictures of its references: to high theatre, the achievement principle, and the durable and restrictive institutions and structures of gazing and interrelation, self-definition, assessment, and inscrutability. We are returned to hierarchies and impermeable (or deceptively temporarily permeable) boundaries. What ultimately becomes clear is the slipperiness of both the structures and their resistance – that which Jon McKenzie might call performance's "liminal-norm" (McKenzie) The ethical vertigo of the piece never fully fades into unity and connectivity; it simply cannot do so. That is the point, or one of them.

[AD] Staring: The information that does not inform

The act of staring, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, is a response we give to the sights that stand out from the banal visual order (*Staring* 3). We stare because we want to *know* what has cast this sight out of the realm of the familiar. Our stares reflect our desire to "stabilize the ordinary world again through finding a coherent explanation for the **inexplicable sight**" (90). "If staring attempts to make sense of the unexpected" then disabled bodies, Garland-Thomson reasons, "might be the exemplary form of the **unforeseen**" (38). Making people confront the bodies that they "expect neither to see, to know, nor to have", they immediately become the object of our most intrusive stares – stares that are in pursuit of "a narrative that puts our just-disrupted world back in order" (39). The way *DT* begins and makes its initial contact with its audience plays precisely with the dynamics Garland-Thomson theorizes. The people who the audience is made to see on the stage are not passively surrendering themselves to the audience's gaze. In fact, this time the audience members themselves are the objects of stares directed at them by the performers. The series of stares, which feel awkwardly long, reenact the staring encounters that disabled people are often subject to in their everyday life encounters. This time, however, the encounter is reenacted within frames of theatre echoing Garland-Thomson's description of the powerful moments when the roles are reversed. By throwing their looks at the audience, the disabled starer tells to the (presumably) **non-disabled staree**: "This is how it feels". "Starees stare back" (84). They refuse to be the passive objects of a prying gaze, hitting that gaze with its own weapon, reflecting it back on itself. One could almost say that in this opening scene, the starees set the terms of their encounter and reclaim the authority that they are stripped of in everyday life (by being stared at), were it not for the time-limit within which they were instructed to keep their stares.

"In its presentational directness," Hilton argues, "*DT* elicits (and, in so doing, insists upon) its audience's fascination with bodily and cognitive difference" (159). Following Hilton's argument, one could add that the audience is even more

Labour, professionalism, and dis/abilities

DT is described by Chiara Vecchiarelli, assistant to the artistic director of dOCUMENTA(13), as "shed[ding] light on the dynamics of exclusion that leads [sic] to the marginalization of those who are considered…unable to produce. With this work Bel tries to expose that, on the contrary, they are able to question the very mechanisms of representation and to hint at existence as a non-partitioned mode of presence." ("A Choreographer, Jérôme Bel…") In this statement, Vecchiarelli links performance's (re)production to social/societal production or productivity. In fact, the links among labour, (re)production, and productivity are present throughout *DT*, driven by investments around labour and productivity on both sides of the collaboration. Bel, for example, is interested in the matrix of disability, **"incapacity"**, **amateurism**, and **failure**, which (for Bel) the actors' bodies stage. In comparison, HORA as a company critically interrogates and plays with and upon the idea of cognitively disabled people's professionalism, both in the realm of performance and as excluded, marginalized members of a society oriented to normative bodies and neurotypical minds, integrated into a landscape of efficiency- and cost-driven neoliberal capitalism (see for instance their latest production, *Normalität. Ein Musical,* 2015).

These investments in labour and productivity come together but, importantly, do not wholly converge, in performance. Umathum notes that Bel, in service of his aesthetic deconstructionist goals, **"delegates"** performance to the HORA actors – using the popular term in art-making now, which also recalls a multinational supply chain. André Lepecki frames *DT* around several senses of work: the labour of creating and rehearsing the production, which becomes the central structural mode of the piece; and the actors' labour as performers, which troubles "the actors' putative privileged access to the presence of

deliberately 'fascinated' when the actors – once finished with silent staring – go onto the stage, again one at a time, to 'present' 'their' disabilities (after being asked to do so). The staring reenactment is over but its dynamics are still at work in this scene. Each 'explanation' of disability feels as if it were a stereotypical encounter between nondisabled and disabled subjects, where the starer asks the staree *in fascination*: "What is wrong with you?" One of the audience members, who is non-disabled, told me after the show that he found this part quite honest in that by explaining their disabilities, the actors immediately removed the taboo of not asking about them. This comment has stuck with me, and prompted further thinking.

Staring, according to Garland-Thomson, is a social interaction that serves as "a conduit to knowledge": instigated by a desire to familiarize the unfamiliar, "staring becomes a starer's quest **to know** and a staree's opportunity **to be known**" (15). It is this knowledge-producing aspect of staring that Garland-Thomson finds most constructive in that it can provide us with a venue to recognize difference and question the status quo at the same time (6). Following Garland-Thomson, one can perhaps argue that the audience, in being provided with 'information' about the disabilities that the actors have, is positioned as a possible starer whose stare is in pursuit of *knowledge* about the disabled body. The question remains, however, do we really get to know one another in new ways by knowing the difference in our (supposedly different) chromosome numbers? It feels as if *the knowledge* that we are provided with is not so much to inform us but to make audiences aware of the **information-seeking impulse** prompted by disability. That is to say, in giving us 'knowledge' about disability– the scene wants to make us aware of the dynamics of staring disability engenders both onstage and off. This is indeed an engaging tension but a risky one. Engaging because it might succeed, and the audience might be left in the discomforting zone of having knowledge and not knowing anything at the same time. Risky because it might fail and the audience might readily take the content of the knowledge without questioning the implications of the act of knowledge-giving itself (as did the afore-mentioned audience who readily accepted the 'revealed' information for information's sake rather than reflecting on its performative function). In any case, both of the possible

presentness" (2015: 152). Thematically, *DT* focuses on re-documenting and re-enacting "the piece's supposedly originary moment, the rehearsals" (148). Lepecki further notes Bel's initial surprise at the HORA actors' "willingness to, and capacity for, work" during high-intensity and -endurance performances at dOCUMENTA(13) and Festival d'Avignon 2012 (2015: 145). This "capacity to consistently re-present the work…ensur[es] that the piece remains repeatable, re-presentable, from venue to venue." (2015: 146) In other words, labour and reproduction (or reproducibility) go hand-in-hand in *DT*. The work's "dramaturgical arc" expresses an ordered narrative of "Bel's requests" and the "work's own compositional history, its own making and unmaking, its revisions" (2015: 151). The composite effect of these repetitions is to "re-presen[t]…a representation of its own process of production" (2015: 152).

Lepecki elsewhere refers to the actors' 'work,' as residing both in spheres of labor and in "systems of representation." (2015: 146) I would agree that the actors' display of their processes of labour – of their meticulous dance rehearsals and ability to **reproduce** the production's scripted aspects – undoes any fixation on their ability to be fully in the present. Clearly, as many authors note, the actors are professionals who have a clear sense of and professional commitment to the separation of stage dynamics from everyday life. The actors' ability to work troubles the fetish of cognitively disabled performers' natural "presence." This aligns with Umathum's and Wihstutz's interrogations of the label of "amateur" (incorrectly translated, I would hope, as "dilettante"), since the actors are professionally trained.

There is, nonetheless, more to say about labour and productivity. The piece directly invokes work in asking the actors to describe their occupations (along with their names and ages). While Bel **shrugs off** this question as "absurd" (Lepecki 2015: 156), in fact the question produces an interesting set of responses, especially when compared to

responses belong to an audience member who is the usual suspect of a staring encounter, i.e. *the starer*, and this starer is none other than the able-bodied person. "The audience constructed from the stage", as Kuppers argues, "still seems to be conceived of as nondisabled" ("Outsider Histories" 49). This presses the question: what about the audience members who are disabled themselves?

During the two performances at Concordia, audiences included Deaf individuals, people in wheelchairs, and parents of children with cognitive differences, among other differently disabled adults, including people with invisible disabilities such as myself. Given the particularity of my viewing experience, I could not help but wonder: How did audience members who have long been the objects of such staring encounters feel about this scene? Did they have any other option than being either happy that the starers were made self-aware of their act or concerned that *the knowledge* provided by the act would be taken simply at its face value?

Undoubtedly, the opening scenes create certain tensions around the act of staring. They nonetheless seem to fall short of the potentially more productive possibilities that staring might open up, for example in the ways envisioned by Garland-Thomson. Perhaps explicitly taking the diversity of audience members into account could have been one way to explore these possibilities, rather than limiting them to a mere reenactment of a staring encounter that **takes it for granted** that all the audience members are *starers at disability*. After all, as Kuppers signaled and the Montreal performances I attended demonstrated, audience bodies can be as multifarious, as UnRulY and as 'unexpected' in everyday life as they are on stage.

"Political Work:": At the Expense of What?

The two consecutive sections present an interesting contradiction. First, the performers are asked by Bel to state what they do in life, that is, their occupation, which is **to act** *as if*, to imitate, to represent. Second, they are asked to tell *perhaps the only thing* that they cannot *act as if* in life. In other words, they are asked to explain 'their' disabilities as features that *are* rather than that *seem to be*.

Bel's other instruction, that the actors describe 'their', in the language of the piece, 'handicap.' Their definitions of 'their' handicaps are all quite different: some actors adopt a diagnostic language, some describe their experiencing of disability, some simply make a performative statement, like Tiziana Pagliaro saying "I don't know". Significantly, However, in response to Bel's request to describe their occupations, each member uniformly states that s/he is "an actor" (*schauspieler(in)*), in a way that does not seem as negotiable (see Lepecki 2015: 156).

I wonder about the process informing this **communal utterance**. Did the actors respond as such straightaway, from the outset, and Bel simply wrote their answers into the script? Did they **mimic** each other's responses? Did some change their minds? Were they tempted to report any other **occupations**? Did any consider naming two jobs? Several of the edited volume's authors address this question, in the context of the amateur/professional divide. Wihstutz, for example, interprets this as an "emancipatory speech act" (39), in which the company members practice and verify their emancipation by naming themselves "actors." This is consistent with Wihstutz's search for a theatre-based mode of emancipation (38), and other authors, like Umathum, also address the professionalization of the actors in terms of cognitively disabled people's **"right to professionalization"** (105). Yet the question "what is your occupation?" (or "what do you do?") has multiple resonances in our present day, beyond the stage, as Lepecki notes (2015: 156). It is a question that many (non-disabled or otherwise) would find increasingly difficult to answer, in a post-Fordist age in which people change jobs frequently, **employment** is less secure and more "**flexible**," and work may not offer an all-encompassing definition of **identity** (i.e., we may not derive our identities from our jobs).

At a time of history when answering the question might cause anxiety

Read in another way, we are initially presented with a scene where performers are both saying and doing the thing that they say, which is, **to act *as if*,** to seem but, importantly, **not be real.** Then this is succeeded by a scene which appears to be its complete reversal: the actors announce something **irrefutably 'real'** about themselves – something that they can never act *as though*. In other words, first come the possibilities then the limits of Western mimetic theatre for disabled people.

Talking about the process of his controversial piece *Jérôme Bel,* in which actors appear naked onstage, playing with their bodies and at one point urinating, Bel states that he was, after Roland Barthes, in search of "degree zero of a dance show" (qtd. in Bauer, "The Movement" 38). The dramaturgy of the piece reflects what Bel has chosen as the formulaic constituents of dance. Referring to the most obvious of these choices – the body – Bel says: "Well, there are two in humanity, woman and man. So I put two naked dancers of different sexes on stage" (38-9). Now, this attempt at representing the erasure of signification through the presentation of naked bodies, their 'purely' biological differences (sexes) and biologically motivated actions (urination), Una Bauer argues, strikes one as a rather naïve endeavor; in fact, so naïve that its naiveté could hardly be unintentional (39).18 What is actually at stake here, according to Bauer, is a zero-sum "game" of signification – a game where the impossibility of perceiving the body, its sex and urine as purely biological entities free from any value, judgment and construction, is juxtaposed with the relentless attempt at displaying them as such (40). This is **a game** that serves no other purpose than exposing itself, its own operations and thus rendering visible the signification mechanisms of performance (40), and leaving its audience in a state of tension, which Bauer calls "movement of embodied thought" (39).

In view of the contradiction that *DT* plays with from the start, I hypothesize that Bel is undertaking an experiment akin to that in *Jérôme Bel*, with its attempted "zero degree of signification" onstage. Bearing Bauer's analysis of *Jérôme Bel* in mind, I would agree with Lepecki's point that *DT* is problematizing the 'presence' and 'authenticity' of disability through a paradoxical presentation of **"the**

for so many, what might it mean to HORA's actors to make this declaration without hesitation? Further, what does it mean that HORA identifies acting *as* an occupation, when most actors retain day jobs? For those involved in the world of the performing arts, being an "actor" is a **legitimate** occupation. Nonetheless, this world comprises very few, and largely **privileged**, people – Bel's attempts to reveal and interrogate the power structures of large ballet companies, with their intricate hierarchies, do not compare easily to the marginalized legal, social, and economic positions of many people with disabilities, who are often treated as wards rather than subjects, **denied sovereignty**, autonomy, and decision-making power, as well as standard wages and mainstream employment. I would argue that *DT* throws all of this into question by revealing the copious talents and rigorous labour of the actors, as *workers.12* The performance asks what qualities constitute **a worker, economically, politically, and socially.** Moreover, I would argue that that which Bel might identify as "presence" or the ability to be "lost in the moment" may in fact be a sense of affective connection to the labour of representation in performance – a sense of non-alienated labour, or pleasure taken in working.13

This is not to say that Bel might not be exploiting the actors – and arguably he is (Wihstutz 45; Wallin), in making an essentialized version of disability the 'ground' for his critique and deconstruction of performance norms. The HORA actors, nonetheless, also appear to enjoy their labour: as art-making, professional performance work, pleasure in interaction, and on a deep level, as a means of being part of a community or society, **against alienation**. This might make them *both* professionals and "amateurs" in the sense of those who practice a trade/sport/activity out of love (or professional passion). This is *not* the same as "dilettantes," a word that appears repeatedly in the edited volume *DT*, opposed to "professional." Bel clearly appreciates

performers *as they are*" 19 (147). This makes particular sense when we consider Bel's sustained interest in the representational possibilities of theatre emerging from its limits and failures. After all, what better occasion than disability to expose those margins and explore what may lie behind them?20

Disability arts, activism and scholarship teach us that disability is *a form of bodily difference* that has not been adequately accounted for in the traditions of Western theatre. Throughout its acting pedagogies, the disabled body remains, as Carrie Sandahl has demonstrated, a kind of embodiment that cannot be unmade in order for it to be remade by training (256). It cannot occupy a "neutral", "zero position"; it cannot relax and stop signifying, to then take on new signs and embody the traditional significatory mechanisms of theatre (260-2). Herein lie the limits of performance repertoires. Hence, perhaps, the performance's title. 21 If disabilities point at the disability of theatre itself (its limits), then how can this be turned into an enabling occasion for theatre? This seems to be the question that the various experiments of *DT* engage, and its answer lies in doing what theatre knows best, that is, to act *as if*. If disabilities leave theatre with a corporeal realness and presence that it cannot easily unmake, then – so reads the piece's **experiment** – a way to challenge this challenging of the theatrical apparatus is *to script that realness itself.* It is not for no reason that Remo Beuggert explains 'his' disability as not being able to remember things very well when he obviously can remember this line well enough to repeat it on stage. It is not for no reason that the actors (as of the third scene) have to be summoned by their name (to indicate their turn to appear on stage) when the show has been rehearsed enough for the members of the ensemble to recall who appears in what order. And it is not for no reason that, after the many repetitions of the piece, the translator still says "thank you" to Peter Keller in order to remind him of the "time" he needs to leave the stage.22 These are the typical moments when *the scriptedness of disability* and the rehearsed nature of its so-called 'presence' and 'authenticity' reveal themselves. After all, if actors with cognitive differences had, indeed, by way of 'their' impairments, a direct access to the present; were more 'in the moment' than neurotypical actors; were so authentically 'themselves', then how could *DT*, as André Lepecki asks, manage to remain "choreographically, dramaturgically and dramatically *the same*

the non-alienated (and perhaps non-self-conscious) love of "amateurs" (interview with Bauer 47). HORA's **investment in labour,** I argue, reveals the actors as non-alienated workers, whose love for their work shines through in movements and gestures that Bel labels "presence." The piece disrupts an amateur/professional binary – the HORA actors' training does not interfere with their ability to derive pleasure during the performance, a sense communicated in their micro-movements, like the vectors along which the actors' eyes travel when they enter the stage (Bel interview with Umathum and Wihstutz 172).

One reason that the HORA actors may come across as 'insufficient' for some audience members is that they are professionally trained actors asked to dance (as noted in Umathum 106-7; Wihstutz p44). Bel enjoys this conflation of medium, because it exposes the limitations of technical skill, on purpose. In an interview with Una Bauer, Bel states:

> [M]y work can operate only in the context of dance. […] I would say that I am a theatre director whose subject is dance. I am producing a theatre of dance…I use the frame of the theatre (architecturally, historically, culturally and socially speaking) to analyse dance, to produce a discourse form it. […] What is at stake for me is theatrical representation, what this very strange structure produces…and how it can be interesting to understand the relation of the human being to representation. That is why when people ask me what I do, I answer that I make performances in theatres. (43-44)

Bel is, then, also working against the achievement/self-improvement principle of capitalism by providing a frame for the viewing of people dancing in pleasure – **the site of commingling** of social and 'artistic' dance. Sandra Umathum sees the HORA actors' professional training informing their recognition of the distinctions between theatrical role-shaping and everyday life, and their deep and palpable enjoyment of

– i.e. both consistent and repeatable?" (145)

The piece remains consistent and repeatable because the "impairment effects" of various cognitive differences are being staged by actors who happen to have these very disabilities. [23] Accordingly, the audience cannot stop thinking that these effects might also be what the actors are experiencing 'in the moment.' It is precisely this paradox, this state of tension, or "movement of thought", to borrow Bauer's apt phrase, that *DT* leaves with its audience. On the one hand is the immediacy, presence and undeniable actuality of disability, and on the other, is its possible staging and repetition[24]. When is it that the actor *cannot really remember* things and when is it that he *rehearses not-remembering*? This is the question that is meant to trouble the audience, and such a question occurs to them not in order to make them doubt which manifestations of disabilities are 'true' and which ones are not; but to make them realize that whatever it is that seems to be 'of the body', natural and unmediated can never truly exist as such, unavailable for representation, repetition or mediation. If, in *Jérôme Bel*, Bel gives "an incentive for us to think about neutral as a signifying moment" (Bauer 39), then in *DT* he incites us to question, the undeniable 'realness' of disability as a **signifying moment** in and of itself.

According to Lepecki, the piece's "capacity to transcend the bond *disability = intense presence*" through a paradoxical presentation of "the performers *as they are*" is exactly where its actual "political work" occurs (147). But if there is something 'political' at work here, as Lepecki claims, then I would like to ask: **Political according to *whom*?** *Whose* politics are we talking about? Who gets to that define the parameters of what counts as 'political'? Or more precisely, **at the expense of what** is this "political work" is undertaken?

Of course, when it comes to leaving the audience in suspension between the impossibility of perceiving the body, its sexes or functional needs as neutral and its insistent presentation as such in performance (see Bauer "The Movement"), the audience does not have much ethical dilemma at stake in enjoying this signification game. However, when it comes to troubling the irrefutable 'presence'

being onstage, in character (107, 111-112).

Sovereignty and Society: From HORA's "Free Republic" to Quebec

At the beginning of each performance of *DT* (March 30-31, 2015), two members of Concordia's Critical Disability Studies Working Group (CDSWG) read an op-ed letter that the group had drafted in response to Bill 20, a bill introduced by the Minister of Health and Social Services in Quebec. Bill 20 proposes highly controversial health care reforms as part of its **austerity** measures. As originally introduced, **the Bill** included quotas on family physicians and cutbacks in support and welfare services, which would have devastating consequences for disabled people and their families.14 The letter, which was published in the *Montreal Gazette* about a month later, poignantly underlined the effects that the proposed Bill would have on the lives of many disabled people in the province, who need the services that it was targeting for *cutbacks*. 15 While it may initially seem that the performances of *DT* were felicitous coincidences with the advent of CDSWG's efforts to raise awareness about Bill 20, in fact the performances form an important thematic constellation with the letter and ensuing op-ed – as the performance ecology of *DT* itself may be considered in light of similar questions of disabled citizenship, participation, and sovereignty in Western post-industrial societies. These questions, which Yvonne Schmidt takes up in her discussion of *Freie Republik HORA,* pivot on interpretations of disabled artists' labour and work. Below I outline some considerations around disabled labour as related to performance.

As stated above, the event of *DT* functions like **a floating ship of state**, creating an alternative space with divergent rules of economy, politics, aesthetics, and sociality, to which the audience is gradually

and reality of disability through the scripting and repetition of its signs and 'markers', then the stakes of invoking a controversy are much higher. As disability theorist Fiona Kumari Campbell cautions us with the example of "the continual use of photographic images of people exhibited as freaks when alive, and re-exhibited to illustrate ableist practices", such an activity might cause further damage even if it is seeking to expose practices of ableism (28). The same risk applies to the case of *DT*. After years of disability activism and advocacy and the sensitivity built around the traditions of fixing and stereotyping disabilities, **the staging of impairment effects** (for whatever intention) might inadvertently come to reify and essentialize those effects, and the experiment that the piece is undertaking might fall back on itself. That is to say, the "political work" or the "emancipatory" aspect, in Wihstutz's words (40), of the performance, because it relies on disability to succeed, at the same time runs the risk of **sacrificing** the emancipatory project of disability politics itself. Hence the responses given to it end up highlighting either the failure or success of this strategy25.

After all disability politics is perhaps, as Wihstutz claims, not the main concern of *DT;* rather, it seems most interested in the broader politics of performance (50). Still, one cannot help but wonder (especially if Read's formulation of "an ethics of performance" is kept in mind): When did the political work of performance stop being about the politics of the lives and narrations of people that it presents and represents?... In response to this question, I would now like to make a sharp shift and slip into an entirely different trajectory. In order to disinter the political aspects of the piece, I turn to a particular model of analysis that draws on **my re-theorization of James Gibson's (1979) "theory of affordances"** within the context of disability and performance. Since both the theory itself and my interpretation of it are new to this interface26, I take the space to introduce both in detail with the hope that this particular re-theorization of affordances could serve as a model to rethink and review other performances involving disability, on or offstage.

introduced. The performance is what I would call *a mobile social realm* with pedagogical effects – exerting a teaching function, for normate and cognitively disabled audiences alike, around self, state, and society. Creating a new event-time and -space in which to enfold audiences in other types of labour relations, HORA's theatre work furthers the production of critical (anti)sovereignty.

DT pushes against nation-state sovereignty in its border-crossing mobility, transportability, and translatability.16 Arguably, Bel's prestige and high-profile status has lent special attention to HORA (Wihstutz 41): Wihstutz argues, for example, that Bel's participation in the piece allowed for the performance to become an emancipatory act because they were able to perform before a large and diverse array of international and elite audiences, rather than their previously limited audience of relatives and friends in Switzerland. In exchange, as it were, HORA offered the foundation for Bel's practice of utilizing performance's representation to query and interrogate central structures and themes of representation – the dramaturgical contours of an interlock of gazes, for example, and representations of gestures and choreographies attached to **hierarchies of professionalism** and aesthetic virtuosity. Vecchiarelli notes Bel's "interes[t]…in what stands beyond representation. In his choreographic works the rules of dance and theatre are treated like the syntax of a language that is analyzed and eventually put into play. Danced and spoken by professional as well as by amateur performers, his choreographies could also be seen as a statements in favour of the democratization of dance, which he pursues in a way of a non-virtuous [sic] approach" ("A Collaboration with Jérôme Bel"). Although Bel has stated (in an interview with Una Bauer) that he disagrees with the idea that his dance is democratizing in its goals and outcomes, we could ask: how might Bel's (perhaps unintended?) interest in democratization intersect with HORA's interest in creating a "Freie Republik HORA" (Schmidt 227-240)?

Introducing James Gibson's "Theory of Affordances"

The term "affordances," coined by James Gibson, comes from a field that has little to do with performance, ecological psychology. Gibson proposes his "theory of affordances" as part of his ecological approach to perception and since its inception in the 1980s; it has been taken up by a variety of fields, including design, media studies, and human computer interaction. Despite its potential relevance for performance and disability studies, however, the idea of **affordances** has not yet been explored **at the conjuncture** of the two fields. Below is my interpretation of the theory of affordances as I read it from the very intersection **of disability and performance**.

Affordances, in Gibson's proposal, are offerings of the environment (127). Or, to be more precise: They are **possibilities of action**, the actualization of which depends upon reciprocity between the properties of an organism and those of the environment. This organism-environment complementarity is what Gibson intends to capture with his coinage (see Gibson 127). Upon seeing a flat, rigid, and knee-high surface, I do not only "directly perceive"27 its surface but also **the possibility of sitting** embodied in its material. In the same substance where I perceive the affordance of sitting, however, **a blind person** may perceive, through the extended touch of his cane, **the danger of tripping**. Organism-environment reciprocity guides not only different action possibilities, but also the different modalities in which an action could be performed. Accordingly, one can say that each time an action is undertaken, it occurs anew by way of an emerging complementarity between the properties of the subject (its bodily scale, abilities, needs, emotions and predispositions) and those of the environment.

While Gibson theorizes that affordances always occur in relation to the properties of the observer (143), he also adds the caveat that their existence is not dependent upon an individual's perception of them. An affordance, "being invariant, is always there to be perceived" whether the observer attends to it or not (139). In order to distinguish the affordances that have already been actualized from those

I am interested in the link between non-discursivity – **non-representationality** – and **democratization**. HORA is also interested in this link, critically playing with it – since in HORA, cognitively disabled people *do* represent, craft discourse, and spin artifice. They are, as stated above, actors – they do not laminate amateurism to 'democracy.' But they are interested in seizing the means of production and representation, as evidenced in their work. As Yvonne Schmidt aptly discusses, HORA members are interested in something beyond popular sovereignty, an almost **anarchistic multilateral seizure** of the means of creation and decentering of hierarchies of control, both in performance and in everyday life. In *Freie Republik HORA* (2013), they take over the theatre and do whatever they want for a given duration. They are the ones **'in charge'** – the producers – as well as the artists/actors. They are in control of this performance at every level. The title, "Free Republic," is not a coincidence.

To Schmidt's assessment of HORA's "free republic," I would add: connected to such a reenvisioning of **the polity** (using the metaphor of the theatre as a "stage" for **the polis**) is the sovereignty of the individual subject. Many of HORA's members are aware of their legal status as 'wards,' and their dance solos in *DT* provide alternative visions and deployments of a **"disabled sovereignty"** that seeks something beyond full subjecthood, as understood in liberalism's sense of the social contract, or "inclusivity." The performance arguably pushes audiences to resist the normate desire to make cognitively disabled people into signs of the "excluded," the subaltern, and antihegemonic categories that are sometimes recuperated as "resistant." This is purposefully *not* on display. Rather, the performance pushes for a reconceptualization of the subject by deconstructing the politics of aesthetics, whereby the "kinaesthetic subject" is centered and made primary (Lepecki 2006). Modernity's self-contained, **sovereign-**

that remain potential, Gibson then proposes the term **"niche"** (128). A niche refers to "a setting of environmental features that are suitable for an animal, **into which it fits**" (129). It stands for a set of already actualized affordances. This means that at a certain point in time and place, there may be affordances of multifarious kinds that have already been utilized, ranging from those materialized as objects, tools, places and technologies, to those kept alive in our collective mundane actions – a repertoire which Alan Costall covers with his term "canonical affordances"(1997). "But for all that we know" Gibson adds "there may be many offerings of the environment that have not been taken advantage of, that is, *niches not yet occupied* (emphasis added)" (129).

I would argue that Gibson's use of the term "niche" relates affordances to the social and, more importantly, to the historical, so that "niche" becomes a tool for placing affordances within the context of history. Not just any history, of course, but *that of the world*, to borrow Ingold's phrasing, "a total movement of becoming" (200). In this continuous becoming "our actions [and our affordances] do not transform the world, they are part and parcel of the world's transforming itself" (200). This **historicization of affordances** is exactly where, as I discuss below, the underexplored **political potential of Gibson's theory** emerges. Moreover, this emergence is where I see the whole idea of affordances interlocking with disability performance.

Strange Curiosity: From affordances to disability, from disability to performance

Gibson was working within the field of ecological psychology, long before the emergence of disability studies as a field, and as such, disability was not something that was addressed within his original conception of affordances. [28] When I think of Gibson's theory in relation to disability, however, I am struck by a strange curiosity: on the one hand, affordances issue from the **complementarity** of organism-environment relations; on the other, disability

bodied (and white, male, heteronormative, nondisabled, neurotypical) subject meets the legal non- or anti-subjecthood of people with disabilities and is challenged by it, beginning with the dismantlement of aesthetic and epistemological categories. The performance, told from HORA's standpoint, might be about revising and revisioning ableist presumptions and definitions of the subject, labour, and representation.

Time

One of the ways in which *DT* proposes **a new type of (anti)sovereignty** is through its oscillating disruption and reinstatement of normative and antihegemonic temporalities. In *Exhausting Dance* (which pre-dates *DT*), Lepecki (2006) has noted the revolutionary potential of lag or slowness – an argument that becomes deeply problematic when applied to HORA (since cognitively disabled people are often portrayed pejoratively as "slow"). This is not, then, a valid example of "choreography's slower ontology." Nevertheless, the performers hold us to a sense of time and space beyond normative control or stricture – almost akin to the sensibility that the notion of **"crip time"** taken up by disability communities tries to capture – so that we can no longer say that a performer is taking "too much" time onstage without recognizing that this is an ableist and capitalist sense of restricted, quantified time (see also Lepecki 2015: 154). In fact, the "excessive time" of the cognitively disabled subject is scripted into the performance of *DT* – an ironic, in my view, romanticization of 'crip time.' (see Petra Kuppers, "Crip Time" http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/crip-time). 'Crip time' is here defined as the delays, late arrivals, and queer temporalities of disability (Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* 26), but s(crip)ting crip time seems to fetishize such temporalities, even as the actors (like Peter Keller, who did not perform in Montreal) take their own critical temporal detours. Likewise, micro-deviations are built into the score for a semblance of

stands precisely for the **rupturing** of that complementarity. The reasons for the disruption can be various: it may have to do with environmental barriers, a debilitating illness, chronic pain or a combination. Importantly, however, in either case, a person becomes disabled precisely because her environment, in the forms it has taken over the years, **does not** readily offer the kind of reciprocal properties to which she can relate. One could thus say that disability, in its multifarious manifestations, **disrupts** the mutuality characterizing affordances. I believe this is both the challenge and the opportunity that disability offers, or rather 'affords', Gibson's theory of affordances. Taking on the challenge, I want to ask the following: What if we begin, therefore, not with the reciprocity of organism-environment relations, but with its very disruption? **What if we were to re-theorize affordances** from that "strange curiosity" that disability gives them? What new possibilities would open up and help us to take "affordances" in new directions?

Having lived a large part of my life with a painful chronic illness, and having collaborated with differently disabled individuals on various ethnographic projects, I came to see that these moments of interruption are inevitably bound up with the idea of "niche," i.e., affordances in their historicity. Here is how I contemplate the connection: a disabled person, not being able to relate to what-is-already-out-there in her environment, may begin moving, sensing and acting in such ways that these **choreographies**, so to say, cannot simply be seen as "just another way doing things". Nor can they be romanticized as extraordinary human resilience or the achievements of a 'super crip'. Instead they exemplify, what I would depict as, **a careful suturing of that ruptured mutuality** – a suturing that brings to life what awaits to be perceived as **an affordance.** As I see it, a disabled person's non-normative (and to some degree illegible) corporeal deeds are exteriorizations of her bodily singularities, her painful and ill states of health as they find their environmental counterparts in the form of *otherwise unimaginable affordances*. The distinguishing feature of these "unimaginable affordances", as I would call them, is that they go beyond the limits of what has already been exploited in the environment, in the form of objects, things, technologies and

authenticity and banality and improvisation. The concretization and **scripting of a replicated disability** onto the "singular" and individualized bodies of the HORA actors reduces the potentiality (and potency), in my opinion, of the creation of (anti)sovereignty in the piece. But in *Freie Republik HORA*, Schmidt observes, the actors utilize some similar forces to Bel's [seemingly] aleatory or clinical mode of (re)presentation to productively move beyond this formula of scripted spontaneity and into a realm of governance of the production: of its labour, effectuality, time, space, tools, and products/exchanges/interactions.

HORA's intimation of **the construction of forms of (anti)sovereignty** through distortion of and play with time, space, and work – imaginative as it is – resonates with the goals of the CDSWG. These goals are to assess critically the relationship of disabled people to the state and society, to advocate for rights and "make visible the systemic ways that society 'dis-ables' such individuals." (Parent and Wallace, "Bill 20 will make it harder"). That is, advocating for disabled people's rights means not only discussing disability but also examining social relations and **architectonics** holistically, as extensions of the family doctor-centered healthcare systems that many disabled people require. These systems fan out into transportation, **infrastructure**, **therapies**, and others structures that are not viewed as extraneous to society but rather integral parts of society, since disability is not "a diagnosis." These are not, in effect, temporary or supplemental services; they are aspects of social relations that are absolutely intrinsic and central to social functioning. As such, the CDSWG critically addresses social structures and processes, aided by the perceptive faculties and **alternative knowledges** that disabled people have through their embodied difference. These ontologies and epistemologies do not need to be translated into a "normate" lexicon; they have intrinsic value without being known or "knowable" by the able-bodied.

socially recognized "body techniques". In their ingenuity, they point at a form of everyday aesthetics, an art of getting by, so to say (In this sense, they remind me much of what Zien describes as "an alternative state", "a new type of (anti)sovereignty"…)

Such affordance-creations are exactly where, the political potential of Gibson's project lies, and such potential is what that "strange curiosity" of disability helps to bring out. **Disability** occurs at the extremities of a niche, at the points where that niche no longer affords fully to the different corporealities of its occupants. As in Elaine Scarry's example of **"the imagination"** being "like a watchman patrolling the dikes of culture by day and night", "repairing, filling gaps, extending, reinforcing" (325, 321), disability patrols the extremities of a niche, mending, expanding, and multiplying its field of possibilities. The meta-transformative potential of disability and its capacity to oversee the environments' historical transformations is what I aim to capture with the term **"micro-activist affordances"** of disability (Dokumaci "Micro-activist"). Whether this activism is intended or not, micro-activist affordances of disability act upon the world's own becoming, overseeing its evolving niches and democratizing their possibilities of actualization, precisely at times and places where they remain most hidden. This process of **subversive affordance-making** occurs (and this is the point where performance comes into my interpretation of affordances) in and through *the temporality of performance* (Dokumaci "On Falling" 114). It is within the temporality of performance that an individual begins relating to the environment in ways that were previously not imaginable – a process, which prompts us to consider **"performance as an affordance creation" in itself** (114). As micro-activist affordances of disability bring the world's possibilities to life within performance, we witness *the very same* environment take different forms and diversify into new niches within the ephemerality of per-*form*-ance, which is what always remains in movement towards the forms that it is yet to take. This is how I contemplate **the vital enmeshing of disability, affordance and performance.**

To return to *DT*, the "political work" of the performance might best be understood

As may be gleaned from the above discussion of the rich constellation of *DT* and CDSWG's actions, the performance was ***not just a passing*** incident in the aesthetic life of a university. Rather, CDSWG employed and engaged with *DT* as a touchstone in its multiple relationships to Concordia, Montreal, Quebec, and Canada.

CDSWG traces some of its momentum to an earlier series of events that are useful to bring into conversation with HORA's performance. During the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics Encuentro in Montreal in Summer 2014, a working group on disability and performance was convened. This working group helped to lay important groundwork for framing critical disability studies as a rallying point both at Concordia and across Montreal. Members of this working group had **staged** an intervention at an **inaccessible** festival venue in the city – a chronic problem that necessitates much more societal visibility and state attention – during the Encuentro. **The protest**, however, was unusual in that it drew both long-time residents of Montreal and international visitors in town for the conference. While employing effective forms of protest performance – including a 'reperformance' of the famous "Capitol Crawl" of 1990 (http://articles.latimes.com/1990-03-13/news/mn-211_1_capitol-steps, accessed 19 January 2016) in miniature – the event also engaged a politics of locality and scale, in which differential knowledges of Montreal-as-locale created divergent attitudes toward an understanding of place and disabled bodies in space.17 The events opened up questions of local knowledge – important to take into account when evaluating accessibility – and international guests. They spawned frictions and disagreements in placing blame, as intersecting with differing degrees of knowledge of Montreal's infrastructural and political geography. Who, in fact, is to 'blame' for inaccessibility? Individual landlords, government agencies, real estate developers, commercial business owners? While the problem of inaccessibility is direly pressing, it is more of a structural problem (thus making it difficult to assign **individuated blame**) than it may

in these terms by the occasions it has provided for *making micro-activist affordances,* both onstage and in everyday life. Let me elaborate by starting with the former.

Individually engaged affordance-creations

With regard to *DT*, one may ask: Why "Disabled Theater" but not "disabled choreography," when it is dance that we see onstage most of the time? In his review of *Nom donné par l'auteur (1994),* an object choreography and Jérôme Bel's first piece, Joshua Abrams writes that it is "choreography stripped of artifice" and yet its framing as dance is a strategic "reminder of how we watch" (43). Perhaps a similar strategy is at play in *DT.* There is a group of trained actors on stage who are performing solo dance pieces – a discipline in which they are less specialized. 29 Importantly, however, the event is framed not as dance but as theatre. Remove that framing though, there is nothing much to prevent the audience from viewing what is happening on stage as formally akin to an episode of television's "America's Got Talent", where we are supposed to appreciate choreography in its transformation from amateurism to professionalism. The overarching frame, however, is theatre. It encompasses dance, both in the title of the piece and in the actor's very first statement: "…and I am an actor". This rather puzzling statement of the obvious, as Umathum points out, has a functional purpose in that it instructs us to consider the rest of the show from this lens (106). The members of the ensemble might have been asked to dance but "they are on stage *as actors* and do not stop *being actors* just because they have not been asked to act in a conventional way" (107). In this respect, no matter how much one would like to appreciate the Jérôme Bel trademark "choreography-divested-of-virtuosity", this becomes almost impossible in *DT.* It becomes impossible, I would add, not necessarily because of the previously mentioned genre-markers of theatre but mainly because HORA actors are too good at what they are doing. That is, *acting*: creating what Teemu Paavolainen (35) calls **"'performed' or 'improvised' affordances"** onstage (terms to which I return later).

As I watched the dance solos of *DT*, what I felt I was seeing unfold in each was

appear at first. Nevertheless, the events related to the Encuentro were crucial rallying points for some who had been working on such issues for a very long time. In precipitating further awareness and interest in critical disability studies, they were **transformative** lightning rods.

Like the Encuentro, *DT* involved visitors coming to Montreal from outside of Canada and therefore offered a new arena (framed by the event's differential space and time) in which to explore and set into relief seemingly intrinsic national or provincial issues. The degree of the state's penetration of and intervention in disabled people's lives came to the fore in the critique of Bill 20. The Montreal engagement with HORA echoed HORA's earlier interactions with Bel, another visitor who had come in from outside of the company to highlight certain underexamined aspects of its locale. Perhaps this visit helped to shed new light on **disabled power** in Western capitalist society. After the performance, we saw a notable strengthening of CDSWG, which gained visibility and legitimacy on campus and in the city and province. In addition to speaking publicly about critical disability issues, the group conducts substantial research and community-outreach events on various topics. At a recent meeting, critical and queer "crips" and Deaf scholars and artists mingled and discussed their research, film production, conferencing, and many other topics of interest to the group – a buzzing, generative space with ASL and LSQ translators actively circulating among and within the discussants.

While *DT* arguably had (and has) little to do with Canada, the group's visit was helpful in providing a parallel space to (re)think disabled people's relationships with the state of Quebec. The relationships that HORA reveals in its process of working, both on *DT* and *Freie Republik HORA,* enact **pedagogies of disabled (anti)sovereignty** that push against the nation-state, calling its lacks

the per-*form*-ance of an affordance-creation. The way Remo unmakes the functional properties of **a chair** (the chair begins to afford many other movements, among them sitting); the movements through which Sara lets **a scarf** dance; and the way Julia, Tiziana and Damian manage to slip their singularities into their citations of popular culture are many of the performative moments where dance affordances are made anew.[30] Most importantly, they are exposed in-their-making. Of course, when compared with their reference points, these solos might, as Wallin writes of Tiziana Pagliaro's choreography, miss "the clarity and timing of a neurotypical professional dancer or pop singer" and thus appear "non-virtuosic" (70-1). But this does not seem to be the point. **The affordance-creations of HORA** actors are neither failed virtuosity nor the expression of authenticity, or worse, a story of triumphing over 'one's' disability. To the contrary, they are the reiterations of the rehearsal process in which the performers sought out new relationalities with their material surroundings in and through per-*form*-ance. In the end, whatever we glean from the performance is not an affordance that has been fine-tuned through training[31], but the initial moment of an *affordance-creation* exposed in its process, ever anew, ever becoming.

Rethinking the issue of amateurishness from this lens, what becomes striking in the solos is not *the absence of dance virtuosity* but, I would say, *the existence of acting virtuosity* that keeps this piece alive and reiterates the so-called 'lack' of virtuosity in each and every performance. If dance solos make HORA actors look like amateurs, as has been claimed, then one could say that the actors professionally perform that amateurishness, and that amateurism has nothing to do with dis/abilities. Rather it has to do with performance being, as I have outlined, a medium of "affordance-creation" in itself, and the actors' virtuosity in repeating the 'original' moment of creation each time.

"Behavior affords Behavior"

The affordance creations of *DT* were not limited to its individual solos. "The richest and most elaborate affordances of the environment," Gibson writes "are

and gaps into question, and possibly proposing alternative areas of convergence around critical disability concerns and needs.

Katie leaves the stage to take a break, stretch, walk around, etc.

Finally, she settles herself in a chair in the auditorium to attend to

Arseli, who has more to say.

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provided by…other people," in the sense that "behavior affords behavior" (135). As actors danced their solos, **each performance afforded another performance** – those of their fellow actors in the background. The actors resonated with one another, applauding, **cheering**, tapping their feet; sometimes interacting with each other as they sat, whispering, talking, extending their arms and legs on each other, sometimes giving cues, throwing and catching things; sometimes simply showing gestures of unrest when things diverge from the plan (as Remo did when, on the second night, Matthias responded to an ovation by dancing into the audience). One could not tell exactly to whether these interactions were improvised, staged or both. Without question, however, they were, as Hilton (160) and Kuppers (35) agree, the most joyful moments of the piece. With their harmony and fluidity, these interactions revealed how disability, in the words of Hilton, "allows and often requires alternative forms of relationality and care to emerge" (160). It may be the case that we were watching a piece composed of *individual* solos, but these emergent "forms of sociality" (160) pierced through the walls of individuality. In their "mutual affordances" (Gibson, 135), HORA performers reminded us of the complex reciprocity of human behaviour and what it means to be part of something larger than oneself.

Affordance-creations are contagious

In *Theatre/Ecology/Cognition*, Teemu Paavolainen argues that in theatre, one could speak of "performed" or "improvised" affordances, in addition to "the immediate" or "the socially constructed" affordances of everyday life (35). These additions to "what is physically possible", he writes, "may override the range of what is considered proper in a culture" (35). While Paavolainen is right about the specificity of affordances happening onstage, my experiences and observations of having hosted HORA as part of working group made me also wonder whether in theatre, we can really restrict the occurrences of "improvised" affordances to the stage. Let me explain this with an example.

During HORA's rehearsal before opening night, we encountered a 'problem'. As

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part of our attempt to make the event as accessible as possible, we had sign language interpreters for both nights. Evidently, signing required light to be seen. As Chris Weinheimer had politely reminded us, however, the piece had its own lighting specifications which would be compromised if we were to illuminate the entire space. So we, together, had to improvise an affordance. We found **a desk lamp,** which we attached to the handrail on one side of the elevated seats. We reserved a few seats at the front, placed the lamp over them, at such an angle that both the performance and the interpreter would be visible to D/deaf audience members while not compromising anybody else's visibility. This was one of many affordances that emerged throughout the everyday labor of bringing *DT* to Montreal within the context of a critically aware working group. I can extend the list by adding the affordances of a more impromptu kind, such as collectively engaging in Deaf applause or not standing in front of audience members in wheelchairs, and of the more calculated kind, such as picking a black box theatre in an accessible building with accessible washrooms, making room for multiple wheelchairs at the front row and offering audio-description. Perhaps these "micro-activist affordances" of the everyday, which tacitly accompanied the very "affordance-creations" of HORA actors onstage, were what set the Montreal experience of the performance apart from its most international counterparts. At the end of the day, "what is physically possible" (Paavolainen 35) was not only "improvised" onstage, but within the whole surrounding environment of which the stage is part. As the critical lens of disability permeated the organization of the event (restructuring its infrastructure), **everyday life itself** became a venue for *affordance-making and sharing*, indivisible from the theatre and the affordances that it occasions onstage.

Of what remains yet to be actualized…

Having pointed out the playfulness of HORA's individually and collectively engaged "affordance-creations", as well as our 'backstage' affordance-making, I need to mention a rather individual disappointment that I had. Disability, in and of itself, may not be the main concern of *DT,* and I am well aware that the piece may

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not necessarily be, as Kuppers suggests, informed by questions that drive disability arts culture (see "Outsider Histories" 35). Even so, I could not help but feel a deep longing for the radical potential of disability affordances to push beyond what I already saw in the piece.

Late disability theorist Tobin Siebers writes: From "[d]eaf eyes listen[ing] to the public television" to "[f]eet wash[ing] the breakfast dishes", disabled individuals alter "the process of representation itself" (54). In this respect, I kept thinking about what **disability affordances** could have done to the very mechanisms of performance. I ask this question perhaps because I did not had the chance of seeing Peter Keller perform in *DT*; according to Lepecki (158-59) and Wallin (78-79), Keller comes up with an alternate and resistant form of acting that unsettles the work's rigid structure and endows it with a critical tone. I seek consolation in these accounts of **Keller's monologues,** thinking that it is in them that the presumably subversive and creative genre of performance yields its own art form and representational structures to **a further subversive force** and, as such, the affordance-creations of disabled actors take on a radical and transformative character, even when the piece is not proclaiming itself to be an example of "disability performance".

What has DT afforded?: DT *in relation* to…

Disability, when it enters theatre, not only enters the stage but also the everyday life of which the stage is part. Because it is inevitably entangled with the materiality of the body and the world, disability prevents us from forgetting the same material ground on which both performance *and* everyday life take place, and the action possibilities that this ground permits (or forbids) to both. For this reason, **disability forces theatre to face the limits of its own "niche",** i.e. the extremities of its already actualized affordances. From its ableist (even hyper-ableist) actor-training methods (see Sandahl 262) to its disabling venues, buildings and places, theatre, thanks to the lens of disability, confronts the limits of its own action possibilities – action possibilities that are offered (or hindered) by the very niche that it has come to be over the course of its history. [32] As a meta-critical lens,

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Discomfort as Resting Place

(Resting in Discomfort)

disability reminds theatre of its mundane realities, of its everyday labour and what has been precluded, excluded and hierarchized therein. Perhaps this *meta-critical reminder* is what distinguishes "disability performance" from any other performance practice. Like "the work of imagination," described beautifully by Scarry (321) disability performance "patrols the dikes" of performance practices, including theatre, extending their possibilities.

One could argue that it is not clear how many of these subversions *DT* realizes, or whether it ever intended to realize any of them in the first place – particularly if we, after Schmidt, consider "theatre-making as a social process" and remain wary of the "power relations" that it may incorporate (228-9). If such a question is to be asked, perhaps it makes more sense to ask it in the post-*DT* context, as Schmidt proposes in her discussion of ***Freie Republik HORA*** – HORA's ongoing experiment. In the views of its creators, *Freie Republik HORA* represents "a "journey" that began with *Disabled Theatre*" (239) – one that aims to, according to HORA's director Michael Elber, "let the ensemble direct itself in order to abolish the hierarchy between a non-disabled director and the disabled performers" (228). Of course the process, Schmidt recounts, is not so straightforward and without challenges, bringing her to the conclusion that the piece, "in some respects […] is only an intermediate step, a try-out in itself" (237). It is not the end-result but the inter-connectivity of events that matters here. *Freie Republik HORA* is, as Schmidt argues, "a critical response to *Disabled Theatre*, whose examination of the conditions of disabled performers' autonomy and authorship it continues and takes one step further" (228).

When thinking about "how subversive *DT* is", we can follow Schmidt's line of reasoning and consider ***DT* in relation to other events** and processes rather than as an event in and of itself. In its home country, it has led to an experimental process of theatre-making, including *Freie Republik HORA* – a collaboration that takes places **at the extremities of theatre's niche**, forcefully questioning its conventions, internal dynamics, inherent tensions and frictions (see Schmidt 240). In Montreal, it instigated many ongoing discussions, dialogues, and disagreements; it strengthened local awareness about access to arts; and it has spawned of a series

Cycling back to a conclusion, by way of the beginning
we return to our

discomfort and state of

un/knowing.

While Jérôme Bel has a signature interest in the audience's discomfort, in *DT* HORA effectively comes to possess authorship of and for the production of discomfort. It is

impossible to find **"lines of escape"** (146)
from the ethics and politics of

 encounters with disabled people in everyday life.

Taken as a temporary totality,

the piece raises important questions – and the fact that it does not answer them is not a "problem."

It is important to let the
discomfort of the encounter
emerge in performance – to court irresolution

 and **irresolvability**. Our discomfort attains ethico-aesthetic dimensions.

DT creates as a totality, albeit a temporary

of "micro-activist affordances" almost pedagogical in their effects. Most importantly, it gave further visibility to the activities of a critically aware working group within a city that relentlessly *disables* its inhabitants.

Just like other components of the environment, such as objects, places and people, **"events" have affordances too**, Gibson writes (102). Following Gibson's proposal, we may consider what Schmidt reports of the post-*DT* process, and what we tell of the same process in Montreal as *the affordances of DT as an event* in and of itself. Whatever *DT* has 'failed' or 'achieved' to do as a theatre piece, it (as an event) has certainly afforded new possibilities – possibilities that have already been and continue to be taken up in Canada and beyond.

one, and we have examined

       some relationships

created in and through it.

For this reason the post-show Q&A, when some of the HORA actors
came back onstage to discuss the performance with us, offered

a performance of its own. I pondered the meaning of

connecting and communicating with

the 'real' people of HORA – as

the Q&A form intends to convey the 'real' person

     behind the actor's mask.

       Was that our experience in Montreal?

And what

about our specific audience

       on the day that I attended the performance?

Not having conducted interviews, I can only speculate from those I

glimpsed in the crowd: heterogeneously disabled and non-disabled; some

well-

versed in critical theories of disability,

           others not; some knowledgeable about dance and

performance, others not;

      gathering at a Canadian academic institution;

bracketing

performance with discussion of

   the recently proposed

      Bill 20.

<div align="center">

Scene 5:

End, Already.

In non-conclusion…Polyvocality: Where is *Disabled Theatre*?

</div>

Since its creation in 2012, much has been said and written about *DT*, often polarized between highly generous and critical reception. It is such that today one can hardly tell **where exactly** *DT* is: on the stage? In these ongoing discussions? Somewhere in-between? Perhaps this implacability and open-endedness is precisely where the piece should be located. We must take into account a number of factors that ensue from the piece but extend well beyond it, such as: the broader public and international venues that HORA ensemble has been able to access; the interest the performance has raised in neurotypical audience members who hitherto had less exposure to disability (see Wihstutz 40); the impact it has had on HORA's own creative working process, making them experiment with new methods in light of the questions that *DT* has raised; and even perhaps the impact it had on Jérôme Bel's work. Instead of expecting the piece to "resolve all of the questions it raises" (which does not seem to be its intention anyways), one shall perhaps, as Leon Hilton suggests, focus on the way the piece invites us "to think more expansively about how various and multiply calibrated levels of cognitive capacity come together in performance, and (by extension) in the world" (162). This is precisely the effect that the two performances of the piece have had at Concordia. *DT* has opened up discussions, stirred dialogues around disabilities in general, and in disability theatre in particular. These discussions became a further driving force for our Working Group on Critical Disability Studies. And it is from one of these productive dialogues that this article has emerged.

Katie stands up and rejoins Arseli onstage. The two shake hands, hug, exchange high-fives and fist bumps, before exiting together, linked at elbow and mind.

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[1] On the "we" paradox of audience-naming: I find myself slipping from 'I' to 'we' promiscuously. In fact, one intriguing component of the performance (and of performance in general) is the fact of the audience, at once an ephemeral social collective and a gathering of deeply internalizing individuals, which makes it impossible but tantalizing to infer a "we" from an "I." I'll continue using both, for the provocative effect that this yields. At the Concordia performance, sponsored by the Critical Disability Studies Working Group, the audience contained a mixture of non-disabled and disabled people, and the piece was presented from the explicit angle of activism and research in performance and disability. This is a distinct orientation from the festival and high-art audiences to which *Disabled Theater* has often played. Additionally, I want to avoid using the word "emancipation," as Benjamin Wihstutz does in his description of the performance's 'beyond the boundary' effects. The term "emancipation" seems to me too heavy-handed for an ultimately ambivalent and multifaceted event that is performance. We performance scholars are too often hypercelebratory, as Laura Edmondson (2007) reminds us.

[2] Needless to add, *Disabled Theater* is far from the first time disabled actors have performed on Canadian stages. For example, disability arts have a history that dates back to the rise of disability rights movement in the US and the UK. Space would not allow me to count all the individual artists and companies that constitute this history (for a detailed account, see Kuppers, *Disability and Contemporary Performance*, and Johnston). Regarding *Disabled Theater*, however, it is one of the first times that disabled actors have been able to perform with one of the most famous choreographers in contemporary dance and thereby have access to "high-end" performance venues and festivals that disability theatre companies (marginalized as they are) rarely have access to.

[3] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson proposes the term "normate" in order to refer to the privileged subject position that assumes itself to be given and neutral by way of relegating atypical human beings to the margins (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8).

[4] I will use the word 'their' in scare quotes throughout the text in order to emphasize that disabilities are not the 'properties' of disabled people. Instead they relate to a variety of factors, including environmental barriers, bodily/mental differences that are marginalized by social norms as well as chronic diseases and painful conditions, which do not 'belong' to the person either.

5 *DisAbility on Stage. Exploring the Physical in Performing Arts Practices* is a practice-informed collaborative research project led by Anton Rey and Yvonne Schmidt at the Institute for the Performing Arts and Film, Zurich University of the Arts. Its aims are defined as "to foster a discourse on dis/ability within Swiss Art Schools and universities by questioning models of dis/ability in theoretical reflection, performing practice and education." (*DisAbility on Stage. Exploring the Physical in Performing Arts Practices,* Zurich University of the Arts. Web. 01 April 2016.)

6 See our work group's statement about the intervention, "Performing Disability / Enabling Performance" Work Group, Web. 01 April 2016. ‹mia.mobilities.ca/encuentro/work-group-statement/›

7 This gesture, though intended to enable all to attend the production, proved offensive for its suggestion (reinforcing commonly held beliefs about performers with disabilities) that the HORA actors were not labourers who deserved fair compensation, but performed for 'charity.'

8 The participatory 'trick' syncs well with Bel's statement in interview with Umathum and Wihstutz, that he "hate[s] participatory theatre" (174).

9 For lack of a better term, I use the phrases 'cognitively disabled' and 'people with cognitive differences' interchangeably. Following Eva Kittay and Licia Carlson (1), I employ "cognitive" instead of "intellectual" or "mental" on the grounds that it is a broader term than the latter two, including neurodiverse individuals as well as people with developmental differences.

10 First, the cast of *Disabled Theater* is not at all 'deprived of' their agency. As Schmidt notes, they make their own choices, with regard to the music, choreographies and even their costumes (2015, 232). Second, as Eva Kittay and Licia Carlson summarize, there are different conceptions of agency and not all of them rely upon "the autonomous actions conceived and executed by a singular individual" (2010, 13). Some of these can be, as several of the articles in the author's edited volume indicate, construed as "collaborative", "social and relational" (2010: 13-14). In fact, such conceptions of agency become clearly visible (as I discuss later) in the way HORA actors continue to interact with each other onstage; the way they respond to the person performing, by cheering, tapping their feet, giving cues and throwing/catching objects.

11 Herbert Marcuse's "performance principle" stresses modern society's increasing alienation of labour, whereby workers perform labour for the social apparatus beyond that needed for the maintenance of life. As such, a focus on increasing "performance," with surplus repression serving social domination and capitalist expansion, is foregrounded.

12 On this note, I would hope that future performances of *Disabled Theater* charge a standard ticket price rather than making the performance available to audiences "by donation." Although this latter move was stated by one of the front of house staff members as a way to encourage everyone to event, demonetizing it, I feel that offering the performance free of charge effectively made our attendance into an act of philanthropy and steeply downgraded the framing of the actors' labour *as labour,* and thereby deserving of due compensation.

13 I have not seen HORA's other performances, and am basing these thoughts on the company's documentation. That said, the company's other works appear to explore many facets of disabled sovereignty, both in terms of individual autonomy and in the theatre space as a sovereign space, a floating ship-of-state. The company riffs on its role as castaways from neoliberal society (for example, in their 2015 piece *Human Resources,* a joint production with kraut_produktion, they playfully mock the dreary state of "an individual…completely assimilated to society…who has internalised the modern benefit-cost parameter". For more information, see: Theater HORA. "Human Resources." (*Theater HORA*. Web. Accessed 01 April 2016). The company's members are, by contrast, "the rejected goods of this optimized human capital…going on the offensive." They celebrate their "non-economical outsiderdom," as against utility and the neoliberal mandate. While they might be "less marketable," they are "of indispensable and immaterial value." This echoes in many ways the place of performance as theorized by Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked,* as an irreducibly anti-capitalist, anti-objectifying site.

14 For more information, see: "Bill n°20: An Act to enact the Act to promote access to family medicine and specialized medicine services and to amend various legislative provisions relating to assisted procreation." *Assemblée nationale du Québec.* Date de la sanction-en: November 10, 2015. Web. 01 April 2016.

15 For more information, see: Wallace, Jacqueline and Parent, Laurence. "Opinion: Bill 20 will make it harder for disabled people to get proper care." *Montreal Gazette*. 6 May 2015. Web. 01 April 2016.

16 In interview with Umathum and Wihstutz, Bel states that *Disabled Theatre* is about problems of communication and translation (164-165). Yet in some respects the piece is also highly translatable – for example, to different geographical sites and with different actors.

17 Note: I am stating the term "reperformance" a bit facetiously. Nevertheless, I hope to indicate that the enactment of the crawl was citing, whether intentionally or unintentionally (I think the latter, though this is speculation), the other famous and visible 'crawl.'

18 After all, this is a choreographer who explicitly states (2002) that the body "is not the sanctuary of truth, authenticity or uniqueness. It is deeply subjugated to culture, politics and history" (2002). For more information, see: Bel, Jerome and Siegmund, Gerard. "miscellaneous - tanz aktuell ballet international 03.2002." *Jerome Bel*. Web. Accessed 01 April 2016.

19 This despite (or perhaps because of) Bel's provocative remarks about HORA actor's "phenomenal" stage presence (Bel 172).

20 In an interview, Bel states "my intuition told me that the way Theatre Hora's actors had of being on stage, which is impacted hugely by their learning disabilities, could reveal it, could make it evident. In a way they perform failure in theatre […]" (archive.kfda.be/projects/projects/2012/disabled-theatre/more, [last accessed July 2015]. I believe that 'failure' here belongs to theatre (and its existing modes, methods) in the face of disability than to disability in the context of theatre.

21 I say "perhaps" because in reference to the talkback session that took place after the performance in New York, Scott Wallin reports that Bel used the term "disabled" in the sense of "weakness or dysfunction", while disabled people and their allies in the audience would have most likely perceived the title to be indicative of a political awareness with regard to the exclusion of disabled people (76-7). A little self-skepticism of interpretations shall therefore still be preserved.

22 Peter Keller left the piece before it was performed in Montreal. Here I base my opinion on the accounts of previous performances. Yvonne Schmidt (233), for instance, notes that this scene, according to the accounts of the people involved in the production, has been heavily scripted.

23 Feminist disability studies scholar Carol Thomas suggested the term "impairment effects" in the late '90s in order to emphasize the embodied aspects of disability, which had then been overlooked by the social modelists of disability who used to insist that restrictions of activity (in disability) are all socially caused (44).

24 Scott Wallin (77), Gerald Siegmund (37) and André Lepecki (145) also point out that Bel's alleged intention to reveal the presence or presentness of disabled actors is offset by the actors' precision in doing their jobs.

25 For instance Wihstutz, on the one hand, finds this instrumentalization, and even possible exploitation, of disability "highly cynical; and yet…brilliant" in its aesthetic effects (50) and Scott Wallin, on the other, sees this aesthetic creativity first for its lack of a critical engagement with what it (ab)uses to achieve its effects (64).

26 For an earlier version of my re-theorization of affordances at the interface of disability and performance, see Dokumaci 2014.

27 According to the tenets of "direct perception", which also undergird the idea of affordances, we perceive the world not by way of processing inputs or through our 'inborn' mechanisms of sensation but by way of our "exploratory activity" in the world, which enables us to actively pick up information about it (Gibson, 147).

28 In his discussion of affordances, the closest Gibson gets to mentioning anything tangentially related to disability is the part where he talks about "injuries" and "negative affordances" (137).

29 In fact, some of the criticism of Bel has been in this direction (Bel 170). Umathum reports that he has been accused of reducing disabled actors to amateurs and not letting their acting skills come to the fore (108). Furthermore, Bel himself acknowledges this deliberate inhibition of acting competency in his defense: "I have never been interested in this" (171).

30 Gerald Siegmund also points out that the solos are "wonderful examples of how the appropriation of cultural knowledge, gestures, and movements informs the bodies of actors and actresses" (25).

31 This could have also been the case, as "training" has an active bearing on the actor's perception and actualization of affordances. For a detailed discussion of the topic, see Paavolainen 34.

32 Carrie Sandahl argues that "the concept of neutral emerged in the late-nineteenth-century industrial age", at a time concerned with normalization and efficiency, and it has also found its way into actor training methods. In view of the inherently problematic nature of this concept, she writes: "The appropriate actor's body for any character, even a character that is literally disabled or symbolically struggling, is not only the able body, but also the extraordinarily able body" (2005: 262).