VisAbility
making disability visible through artistic discourses

I sat down on the floor of a school for the retarded...
...and I don't know what to do...

about the young woman who
put down her Bible and, as if it
were the most natural
thing in the world, rested
her head on my shoulder.

"Hold me, all weapons.
Hold me."

I put my arm around her. Hold me
hugger. I do, and she cradles closer.

Is what we all want in the end, to be held, merely to be held.
For this issue cover, VisAbility: Making disability visible through artistic discourses, it seemed fitting to feature the artwork of Donna McDonald’s ‘art as research’ disseminating visual perspectives of artistic representations of people with intellectual disabilities (see pp 63-68 Gallery). In her article Donna observes that ‘the way we understand ourselves and define our personal hopes and dreams is often mediated by the way other people express their perceptions of us either as individuals or as representatives of a social group, in a range of genres including literature, film, the visual arts, photography and graffiti (McDonald 2018: 30). Through her artwork McDonald expresses her dismay at the dehumanising way photographer Diane Arbus captured people who had cognitive or intellectual disabilities in her 2011 photographic book, Untitled. McDonald (2018) noted that Arbus’s depiction of men and women with disabilities attract the viewer to ‘gaze/stare’. Often seen with masks and strange attire, the images lack of humanity puts them in the realm of ‘otherness’, the grotesque, the carnival freak and ‘performative agents’ (Hevey 1997: 510) which emerge bringing forth the vision of nightmares and dreams.

Could we say the same for artist/photographer Joel-Peter Witkin, who like Arbus, presents the grotesquerie, the freak show where the disabled become the spectacle, but what differentiates Witkin from Arbus is that the disabled, in particular amputees, become his models. He creates a relationship whereby permission is granted to appear in the photographs. Witkin draws on historical, paintings of religious and medical references to recreate images that ask the viewer to think about birth, life, death and everything in between. His work, often finding beauty within the grotesque, extends beyond post-mortem photography with his staged set-ups of corpses and dismembered parts as well as performances by the disabled. Millet (2008) suggests that:

The disfigured body becomes a work of art and source of creative powers. The freak show indeed provides a historical precedent for contemporary disability theatre and performance art, a legacy present in Witkin’s photographs ... [and that] ... photographer Diane Arbus also turned her camera to these sideshows of the 1960s and 1970s. Photographing performers that many would call the dying breed of freaks, although others would call them the next generation, Witkin’s and Arbus’s photographs document how the freak show has lived on.

As a student studying photography in the seventies and eighties both Witkin and Arbus were highlighted as photographers of note influencing a new generation of photographers.

References:

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- copyright release form
- title page listing contributing authors, contact details, affiliation and short bio of approximately 80 words
- abstract should be a maximum of 150 words
- three - five keywords.

Please use Australian/English spelling and follow Harvard referencing. Submit tables, graphs, pictures and diagrams on separate pages. Remove in-text references identifying authors and replace with [name removed for the review process].

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‘The marginality of disabled people has occurred in the midst of the perpetual circulation of images of disability’ Mitchell and Snyder in Narrative Prosthesis.

Discussions of intellectual disability are often found in medical journals, published biography/memoirs, and, of course, disability research, but outside the realm of medicine, personal reminiscence and disability theory, intellectual disability often struggles for social, historical and cultural representation. It struggles for visibility. In 1995 in her research paper ‘Culture and Disability’, historian Karen Hirsch writes: ‘Few historians have included disability issues as an integral part of their thinking and writing’ (1995: 27). In Enforcing Normalcy, also published in 1995, Lennard Davis writes:

There is a strange and really unaccountable silence when the issue of disability is raised (or, more to the point, never raised). The concept of disability has been relegated to a sideshow, a freak show at that, far away from the academic midway of progressive ideas and concerns (1995: 4).

The last two decades have seen a huge leap forward in disability research. In 2010 Down syndrome researcher Jan Gothard wrote:

Until recently, intellectual disability was a relatively unexplored theme in social and historical research in Australia, but over the past decade or so more has been written as disability has become an increasingly acknowledged dimension of social difference (2010: 19).

But Mitchell and Snyder’s famous assertion that, ‘the marginality of disabled people has occurred in the midst of the perpetual circulation of images of disability’ (2000: 3), is hard to ignore.

There have always been depictions of people with intellectual disabilities (such as Down syndrome and autism) in narrative forms such as novels, television, theatre and film, but often these characters are either peripheral to the story, overly relied on for narrative structure, drawn as stereotypical or used to reach some moral extremity: ‘The ultimate test of the salience of a disability representation is the various social and cultural contexts within which they might be thought to have a broader effect’ (Iyer 2007: 25). The disabled character is often used to illustrate and embody a theme that exists outside their interior world. In her paper ‘Depictions of Intellectual Disability’ in Fiction, Anupama Iyer, consultant psychiatrist in adolescent developmental disabilities for St Andrew’s Healthcare, discusses this connection: ‘A character with an intellectual disability [is] a silent Rorschach ink blot onto which society projects its devices and desires’ (2007: 2). Just as the disabled character is expected to carry the weight of a larger social or moral argument, so too is literature seen as doing all the work of representing disability:

Certain critics have made claims about the potential for literature, more than any other art form, to allow a more subtle engagement with the complexities of disabled people’s experiences. Snyder and Mitchell argue that the characteristic intimacy with disabled characters in literature, achieved through the first-person narrative perspective, allows ‘a unique space for contemplating the complexity of physical and cognitive differences’. Their argument that literature by definition ‘makes disability a social, rather than a medical phenomenon’ suggests a privileging of the literary over any other modes of accessing interior personal experiences (Hall 2012: 5).

When first assembling the articles for this special intellectual disability edition of Social Alternatives I was struck by the commonalities not just in the research questions, but in the direction collectively. Each article in this journal examines an artistic expression and discourse beyond narrative fiction, and fiction writing or publication. As readers, we are invited to see or perhaps even re-see intellectual disability through the lens of performance, theatric design, dance and even reality television.

Three of the articles included in this journal focus on the value of performance and the role of the disabled performer. Anna Hickey-Moody discusses the power of integrated dance in schools. In her chapter she unpacks the way ‘dance theatre devised and performed
by people with and without disabilities can create non-hegemonic, open and generative knowledges of bodies that are medically coded as having disabilities. Hickey-Moody introduces the reader to a concept she calls the 'open body', and discusses the value of this new way of looking at both the collaborative practice of dance and its value within education. In a case study of the Blue Roo Theatre Company, Bree Hadley and Artistic Director of the company Clark Crystal combine a 'dual insider-outsider perspective' in order to understand the value of company, its collaborative process in making theatre and how this company subverts the pervasive image of people with intellectual disabilities as childlike or inspirational. In his article 'We Will Look After You', Tony McCaffrey also looks at the value of theatre in creating agency through the performance of Lady Eats Apple by Back to Back Theatre.

Moving away from performance by disabled practitioners and into the photographic representation of intellectual disability are articles, 'We Have to Talk About Diane Arbus' and 'Television as Social Welfare: The Dreamhouse'. In 'We Have to Talk About Diane Arbus', Donna McDonald unpacks the power in a sometimes-troubling series of photographs of disabled people taken by photographer Diane Arbus between 1968 and 1971 in order to understand how people, or indeed images of people, with disabilities are used as metaphors in order to reach some other social conclusion. McDonald provides some history and context of the photos as well as a discussion of the ethical dilemmas in taking them, and how she creatively responded to the series in mixed-media. In 'Television as Social Welfare', Katie Ellis addresses The Dreamhouse, a six-part documentary about three young adults with intellectual disabilities moving out of home for the first time. Ellis focuses on the media and social media reactions to The Dreamhouse in order to pose some important questions about the role of reality television in a post-welfare society and the support of stereotypes of intellectually disabled people.

Moving away from photographic representation is a thought-provoking creative essay by Michael Whelan about his son Connor's Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis. In his article, Whelan provides the reader with a blend of personal memoir, deep questioning about what disability and sickness is, and how stories and narratives might both unyoke him from his grief and provide him with answers. Whelan digs down into questions such as what is narrative? What is illness, and disability? And, perhaps most importantly, are relational narratives written by parents about their children filling a crucial space between the medical and experiential?

Every article in this journal touches on experience. The experience of being a disabled practitioner, or watching disabled performers. The experience of seeing an artwork or making one. Each piece seeks to comprehend, unpack and promote inclusion, empowerment, and equality through a deeper understanding of the ways in which disability is represented and performed and the meanings behind these representations. Each article, to varying degrees, looks at what Ann Millett-Gallant calls 'disabled subjects as performative agents' (2012: 117) and practitioners. Every article examines the pervasive stereotype of the disabled person as childlike, inspirational or unable to significantly contribute to the community, and pushes back against these stereotypes through discussions on the value of creative practice as a space for more accurate representation and a place where community is built.

Inclusion means more than simply having people with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and workplaces. It's about the state of mind which sees people with disabilities accepted as valued, significant and worthwhile members of society: people who have every right to belong (Gothard, 2010: 26).

After having the opportunity to read the articles collected in this journal and seeing the connections between these valuable research areas, I think it fitting to acknowledge one more dimension to Gothard's inclusive state of mind: the right for intellectually disabled practitioners to be visible through artistic discourse.

References


Author

Author: Sarah Kanake is a published novelist, essayist and short story writer. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing from QUT and is a lecturer in Creative Writing at USC. Her debut novel, Sing Fox to Me was released in early 2016. Sarah has won several writing awards including the QUT Postgraduate Writer's Prize (winner 2013), the QUT mentorship (winner 2014), The Australian/Vogel's Award (longlisted 2013) and the Overland Short Story Prize (shortlisted 2013). She has been published in The Southerly, The Conversation, The Lifted Brow, Stilts, Mamamia, Kill Your Darlings, Review of Australian Fiction and Award Winning Australian Writing, and is a regular contributor to UpLit. Her research focuses on the representation of Down syndrome within narrative fiction.
Integrated Dance as a Public Pedagogy of the Body

ANNA HICKEY-MOODY

In this article I examine the possibilities for integrated dance in schools, as a way of opening up how practices of schooling understand dance education and inclusive education. ‘Integrated dance’ is dance made by people with and without disabilities. I examine integrated dance as a movement based practice and show how dance theatre devised and performed by people with and without disabilities can create non-hegemonic, open and generative knowledges of bodies that are medically coded as having disabilities. Such knowledges offer alternatives to some ways students with disabilities are positioned in practices, and academic discourses, of inclusive education. I argue that integrated dance theatre performances create a concept of an open body, an assemblage of affects that is more than the sum of its parts, in which bodies work together as one small aspect of a larger whole in creating affects read by audiences. This affective pedagogy of dance shows us the value of dance as a form of public pedagogy as well as a classroom pedagogy. It offers representations of disability that illustrate the limits of depending on medical ideas of the ‘disabled’ body.

Introduction

The body is a language that cuts across cultural difference. Dancing bodies can move us to feel differently about people, about ourselves, to see bodies in new ways. Dance can open up communication beyond words. Yet dance in schools often becomes taught, and thought, as Physical Education. This choice to position dance as a vehicle for ‘fitness’ and corporal ‘discipline’ rather than as an aesthetic practice is a political act that values the utilitarian function of corporeal movement over the politics of aesthetics embedded in dance practice. Dance has a radical history of offering new ways of relating to bodies. This history is disavowed in rendering dance as a way of ‘getting fit’. Furthermore, inclusive education in schools seldom includes dance, focusing on literacy and numeracy as key competency areas. Bringing critical perspectives on these fields together, I argue that integrated dance has the potential to perform a range of critical and pedagogical functions for schooling. Integrated dance is a method that not only teaches students to know, and relate to their bodies in new ways, it also teaches students with and without disabilities new ways of being a person with a disability and relating to people with disabilities. Further, dance theatre devised and performed by dancers with disabilities can act as a radical tool of the social imaginary, creating new social and cultural meanings of disability. I begin this argument through gesturing towards a body of work in integrated dance that provides a unique methodology for inclusive practice.

Public Pedagogies and Competing Knowledges of Disability

Medical discourses of disability not only serve as means for clinical definition, they also function as dominant public pedagogies of disability. That is, they constitute the overriding public discourse of disability and are remade in different ways across numerous forms of public media and in an array of social fora. I will give a brief definition of my use of the term public pedagogy for those who may be unfamiliar with it. For me, the term public pedagogy mobilises a history of critical scholarship that features important feminist voices. In Feminisms and Pedagogies of Everyday Life (1996) Carmen Luke established the agenda to study public culture and texts available in public culture, as the materials that critically inform our social imagination. Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005), Jenny Sandlin et al. (2011) and Elaine Swan (2015) also offer key contributions to these debates about how culture and media teach, and alternatively disrupt, ideology.

As a brief example, I want to offer a discussion of medical categories of disability used for defining intellectual disability as the ideological ‘truth’ of having an intellectual disability. The definitions of intellectual disability I consider here have been chosen because they were developed by medical practitioners for a lay person’s consumption rather than classifications couched solely in medical terminology. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of disability is perhaps the most popular public pedagogy of disability, and as such I take this as a starting point (see Healey 2000: 1). The WHO definition is later employed as
a global comparison of local classifications of intellectual disability. The World Health Organization’s definitions of impairment, disability and handicap established global models for disability service provision.

For the World Health Organisation:

- Impairment is ‘any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, anatomical structure or function’;
- Disability is a ‘restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being’;
- A handicap is a ‘disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, and social and cultural factors)’. The term is also a classification of ‘circumstances in which disabled people are likely to find themselves’.

These interconnected ways of thinking about disability, impairment and handicap were constructed to facilitate cultural awareness of, and practical support(s) for, a wide range of embodied states that differ from a majoritarian norm.

The WHO later remodelled this three-part definition of disability, impairment and handicap as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, or ICF. The ICF guidelines for assessing health and disability were designed to reconfigure existing ways of thinking about disability, a goal which is transparently acknowledged by the WHO. This conceptual focus is illustrated in statements such as:

ICF changes our understanding of disability which is presented not as a problem of a minority group, nor just of people with a visible impairment or in a wheelchair. For example, a person living with HIV/AIDS could be disabled in terms of his/her ability to participate actively in a profession. In that case, the ICF provides different perspectives as to how measures can be targeted to optimize that person’s ability to remain in the workforce and live a full life in the community … The ICF takes into account the social aspects of disability and provides a mechanism to document the impact of the social and physical environment on a person’s functioning (W.H.O. 2001).

As this quote suggests, the ICF classification guidelines are broad in the respect that they are skill based, rather than defined in relation to people’s clinical medical conditions. As such, people with a range of quite different conditions might be grouped together through a shared focus on their life skills, competencies and (in)abilities.

The W.H.O. ICF classification guidelines are implemented in 191 countries around the world as the international standard for assessing and conceptualising health and disability (Steiner et al. 2002).

As a discursive system, the ICF does not solely inscribe the identities of people with intellectual disabilities on a wall of medical signifiers of a particular condition. Identities are also produced through corporate interpretations of the associations and affiliations made in response to the ICF, and through considering what bodies do and do not do, rather than through connecting a body’s identity to a singular trajectory of medical thought. In many respects, we could consider that the W.H.O. has endeavoured to think about bodies in terms of what they do, rather than in terms that suggest what bodies ‘are’.

Systems of classification quickly become public pedagogies: everyday knowledges that circulate through vernacular and popular cultures. Understandings of people with intellectual disabilities that are not grounded in medical discourses are rare, because even if the topic of intellectual disability is approached from a non-medical background, information relating to – and experiences of – people with intellectual disability tend to be grounded in existing medical knowledges of intellectual disability as they are a dominant frame of reference. My experience as a dance workshop facilitator working with people with disabilities supports this contention, in the respect that I have repeatedly been introduced to participants in light of medical readings of their disabilities.

As the Disability Information Resource Centre (2001) definition suggests, ‘intellectually disabled’ is a name that is applied to a diverse array of bodies. This point is further illustrated by the fact that – for example – facilitating workshops for people with CHARGE is experientially very different from facilitating workshops for those with Angelman’s syndrome. In both instances, in order to offer constructive directions and develop enjoyable, appropriate movement tasks, I need to estimate what will and will not be possible for these participants, working from an imagined sensory template which is markedly different from my own. For example, inverted yoga positions are not possible for people with CHARGE due to their breathing difficulties, as the participant’s airways are further restricted or blocked by the inversion. The participants I have worked with have taught me that I need to be positioned in the darkest areas of a workshop space, a consideration that meant re-orientating rehearsals in relation to the position of the sun. At times, verbal communication needed to be given in close proximity to the participants in question, as
Hughes employed the plural ‘cultures’ here, rather than ‘inspired by cultures of disability’ (1998: 1). Chance and Hughes outlined the company underpins the Restless method. In the company’s early days, Chance and Hughes outlined the company mission ‘[t]o be Australia’s leading youth dance company with intellectual disability. Providing the space in which dancers with intellectual disability are foregrounded as being either ‘with’ or ‘without’ intellectual disability. The company’s methodology … embraces far more than the simple inclusion of … people with a disability in an existing dance activity (Chance 1999: 1). Restless works to do more than ‘simply include’ dancers with intellectual disability through employing the movement based method that is the articulation of the methodologies, or working philosophies, ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ and ‘reverse integration’. I discuss these methodologies before offering some examples of the Restless process.

Integrated Dance

Integrated dance is a term used to describe dance that brings together people with and without a disability. Hilde Holger is widely credited as the mother and founder of contemporary integrated dance practices. Born in Vienna in 1905, Hilde was an internationally established expressionist dancer when she gave birth aged 44 to a second child with Down syndrome. Responding to her son's embodiment, Hilde began teaching dance to trained dancers alongside students with Down syndrome, autism and physical disability. One of Hilde's students, Wolfgang Stange, founded the first integrated dance theatre company inspired by Hilde's work. Amici dance theatre, founded by Stange in London in the 1980s, still operates under Stange's directorship. Building on the groundbreaking work of Holger and Stange, integrated dance theatre companies such as DV8 and CanDoCo (London), Axis, Full Radius, The GIMP Project, and The Olympias (US), and Restless, Sprung, Murmuration and Weave (Australia) have shaped contemporary geographies of dance and disability.

Integrated dance is a contemporary dance methodology that explicitly acknowledges the politics of corporeal aesthetics. This article draws on empirical research with Restless Dance Theatre (Australia), and develops a philosophy of integrated dance theatre practice based on the company's work.

The Restless method for devising integrated dance theatre is explicitly configured around aesthetics of intellectual disability. The personal styles, nuances and attitudes of dancers with intellectual disability are foregrounded in the company's work. The Restless method is based on ensemble process, movement improvisation, some contact improvisation and other contemporary dance and physical theatre techniques.

The work of dance practitioner and choreographer Sally Chance, who pioneered the methodology in collaboration with the Restless Youth Performance Ensemble, underpins the Restless method. In the company’s early days, Chance and Hughes outlined the company mission ‘[t]o be Australia's leading youth dance company inspired by cultures of disability’ (1998: 1). Chance and Hughes employed the plural ‘cultures’ here, rather than the singular 'culture', as there is no single, containable, ‘culture’ of intellectual disability.

While Restless broadly positions itself within ‘cultures of disability’, the majority of company dancers identify as being either ‘with’ or ‘without’ intellectual disability. Dancers with intellectual disability are generally accorded power within the company. Cultures of intellectual disability are read as the styles of embodied relation, movement and distinctive characteristics that constitute the performance material that Restless foregrounds through performance texts.

The Youth Performance Ensemble members are aged between 15 and 26. The artistic rationale of the company states:

The company creates dance theatre built from the aesthetic sensibility of the dancers with a disability, which they have because of their disabilities. The company's methodology ... embraces far more than the simple inclusion of ... people with a disability in an existing dance activity (Chance 1999: 1). Restless works to do more than ‘simply include’ dancers with intellectual disability through employing the movement based method that is the articulation of the methodologies, or working philosophies, ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ and ‘reverse integration’. I discuss these methodologies before offering some examples of the Restless process.

‘Cultures of intellectual disability' and 'reverse integration' have been developed through the work of dancers with intellectual disability, and these methodologies foreground the personal styles of people with intellectual disability. When extending these methodologies, inclusive arts educators might invite students with disabilities to write their own assessment brief, and to determine how and on what terms they want to make a dance work. Student-centred, historically aware and responsive practices of art-making that position disability as an aesthetic source can be seen as extensions of the Restless method.

The methodologies of ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ and ‘reverse integration’ are not rulebooks for practice: they are a way of describing an ethics of practice. They are orientations towards practice that are contingent on their constant re-definition on the terms of dancers with intellectual disability. Providing the space in which this constant evolution can occur is inherently political, and forms the basis of much of the company's work. My writings on these topics are offered as a description rather than a definition. Dance technique within Restless
becomes a method for foregrounding the aesthetics of people with intellectual disability, a process both technically challenging and politically complex.

As I have suggested, the phrase ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ refers to a space without defined boundaries, within which bodies ‘with’ intellectual disability are foregrounded. The concept of a culture of disability is a core aspect of much disability-powered artwork (Allan 2005) and underlies the work of many studies of the social construction of disability (see for example Fine and Asch 1988; Garland-Thompson 1997). As a derivative of this broad concept constructed around the empowerment of people with disabilities, the term ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ is employed in a range of differing global contexts. Within Restless, the term is used to describe the fact that:

Belonging to a culture of intellectual disability is offered to the members of Restless, within the specific context of the company, as a possible means of forging individual identity (Bullitis, et al. 1989: 9).

The group dynamics and personal styles of dancers with intellectual disability are acknowledged as sites in which dancers’ histories and identities are actualised. Everyone’s ‘history’ and ‘identity’ is lived and embodied (and hence located in their personal style). However, foregrounding the creative, physical work of people with intellectual disability is a particularly valuable method for exploring ways of being ‘other’ than intellectually inadequate, as through this methodology, power is attributed to form, and an abstracted notion of thought is not privileged over matter.

Within Restless, a dancer’s physique, their movement quality, and styles of inter-personal relation are considered as sites in which cultures of intellectual disability are primarily located: ‘culture’ and ‘dancer’ are inseparable. As a method of practice, then, the term ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ reflects the fact that within Restless corporeal form, or substance, is regarded as possessing an intrinsic value and is accorded power.

The idea of a culture of intellectual disability, as it is employed in Restless, challenges the power base generally implied by the terms ‘with’ and ‘without’ intellectual disability. Restless challenges this majority/minority divide through positioning individuals with an intellectual disability as being the authors of their own culture, rather than being subjects of inclusion in a broader culture. Within Restless, the idea of cultures of intellectual disability is also employed to challenge the notion of a majority/minority divide by creating dance texts that are accessible to people with intellectual disability and that are written by people with intellectual disability. This economy of production and consumption is notably different from one which entails people with intellectual disability reading and consuming texts created by others who identify as being without disabilities.

A substantial amount of collective labour is required to facilitate a space in which cultures of intellectual disability are foregrounded in Restless. The politics of relations between dancers with and without disabilities are just as related to the production of aesthetics as they are to the company’s profile as a disability powered company. Certainly, the embodied politics of ensemble relations are affected by the company’s profile, however, arguably such relations are affected just as much by the movement texts the company creates. To perform a phrase devised through another dancer’s movement style is to work into the other dancer’s body and (re)inhabit their life.

Reverse integration describes the practice of people without intellectual disabilities ‘integrating’ to fit in with the styles of people with intellectual disabilities. Within the company, people with intellectual disability are referred to as being ‘with’ and people without intellectual disabilities are referred to as being ‘without’. Chance (1999: 115) discusses the rationale behind this terminology:

Being ‘without’ is so often a state of being for young people with intellectual disability; this is why our terminology reverses the state of being ‘with’ and ‘without’ so that having a disability is advantageous if you are a member of Restless. (The opposition of ‘able bodied’/‘with a disability’ is clearly inappropriate when describing skilled dancers.)

‘Reverse integration’ plays with the idea of reversal through asking how the idea of intellectual disability can support rather than ‘disable’ dancers with intellectual disability. Reverse integration is literally about those ‘without’ fitting in with the styles of people with intellectual disability. The idea of reverse integration also translates practically into paying careful attention to, and offering substantial amounts of, emotional and practical support to people with intellectual disability.

As a general practice of inclusive education, the terms ‘with’ and ‘without’ (disability) can be used to challenge the idea of including people with a disability, and as a means of constructing an environment for making art a supportive space in which ‘intellectual disability’ is known as an individual’s style of process and their unique performance quality.

Directors, musicians and performers with specialised skills are contracted to contribute their knowledge to Restless,
and the desired skills are usually an expression of the Artistic Director’s concept for the work being created. For example, the company’s major new work for 1999 was titled The Flight. It was directed by Liam Steel (DV8 Dance Theatre, London) who was commissioned as the director of the work because of his background in physical theatre and dance performance. The Artistic Director of the piece, Sally Chance, received funding from the Australian Council Dance Fund and other funding bodies to mount a work that explored themes of independence, desire, and rites of passage. These themes are issues that were prominent in many company members’ lives while the themes also reflected the ‘moving on’ of many company members from RDT to another stage of their career.

While all ensemble members participate in the intensive process of creating material for a new work, the final performance material is carefully selected and re-worked by the director/choreographer of the performance. Company processes that focus on paying attention to movement styles of performers ‘with’ a disability and foregrounding their creative processes, personal histories and idiosyncratic qualities are maintained with a unique connoisseurship throughout the construction process. All new works devised and performed by Restless are also accompanied by live musician/s who create an original score for the performance and whose work is an integral part of the devising process.

In offering the above description of the Restless methodology, it is my intention to signpost some of the methods through which ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ and ‘reverse integration’ are worked on different levels throughout the process of devising and performing integrated dance theatre. Here, inclusive education is seen as an iterative practice of including those without a disability in the life worlds and movement styles of those with a disability. The goals of these processes are clearly political as much as aesthetic and, while they require fitness in order to be achieved, they are not goals designed to achieve fitness in the same way that school dance curriculum in Physical Education Studies (PE) stipulates fitness as a goal. Schools could teach students a lot about body politics through taking dance out of Physical Education and teaching movement as an aesthetic practice and tradition of activist, and indeed feminist work. Alongside the argument that dance should be taught as dance and not as P.E. in schools, I want to suggest that inclusive education is a practice that should not be confined to schools.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a political and pedagogical project that has parallels with integrated dance. Harwood (2010: 1) establishes the agenda of inclusive education as primarily concerned with building social imaginaries: ‘Conceptualising difference is a key task for inclusive pedagogy, and vital to the politics of inclusion’. Such an approach to inclusive education takes it out of classrooms and indeed out of schools, and into the world at large. Inclusive education becomes a project of making culture and making cultural imaginaries. In the same way that integrated dance works to shift dominant stereotypes of disability, inclusive education as a political and pedagogical agenda places people with and without disabilities on par with each other. More than this, it reconceptualises how we might understand ‘disability’ and invites critical perspectives on the construction of disability through dominant discourses – especially medical knowledges. If we are to consider inclusive education as a practice of generating socially inclusive imaginaries, integrated dance practice can be seen as a key method of inclusive pedagogies. Integrated dance extends school-based inclusive education agendas through generating new public pedagogies of disability.

Maxine Greene (2007: 1) explains the particular role that art has to play in how public pedagogies shape social imaginaries: ‘Pondering pedagogy, I think of becoming – teachers becoming, learners becoming. And, yes, I think of making and perceiving works of art, actions that are always incomplete’. Greene explicitly positions works of art as core to processes of creating inclusive teachers, indeed to processes of making new social imaginaries. Works of art teach us to feel and think in new ways. Greene continues:

Certainties, fixities, final solutions; they are yearned for much of the time. On some level, no matter who we are, there is always a desire, a quest for certainty; and numbers of people, at a time like the present, are convinced that they have found it. There has always been a tension between those who depend upon some invisible authority for answers and sanctions and those who have learned to exist in uncertainty, with notions of unrealized possibility rather than the comforts of assurance and predictability (2007: 1).

Greene is instructive in encouraging us to be able to exist with uncertainty and, indeed, in advocating for the role of art in building this capacity to exist with uncertainty. I would take issue with Greene about the ‘invisible authority’ that provides ‘answers and sanctions’, as, especially for those working in inclusive education, I would suggest that such authority is by no means invisible. Authority is the black and white striated lines of medical discourses of disability, of curriculum discourses and of STEM areas of core learning – dominant systems of knowledge that
function as ubiquitous public pedagogies of disability.

Restless Dance Theatre’s public pedagogies of disability (Hickey-Moody 2009) have similarities to, and differences from the work of CanDoCo, a London based inclusive dance company with an international profile for creating high quality dance with disabled and non-disabled performers. I discuss the work of CanDoCo as my second example in this paper as, taken together, the work of Restless and CanDoCo show us that inclusive dance practice is a global public pedagogy that is creating social change through aesthetic forms. CanDoCo dance enables disabled performers to have access to high quality artistic work and firmly locates disabled dancers in the landscape of contemporary dance choreography. The artistic co-directors of the company, Pedro Machado and Stine Nilsen, explain the company’s work saying:

When we commission choreographers we look for someone who shows an interest in exploring movement, investing in the dancer's movements and challenging them further. We believe this combination of choreographers' vision and dancers' input captures a form of collaboration that lies at the heart of of CanDoCo … Our mix of disabled and non-disabled dancers always enriches the work we do, inherently bringing with it new ways of doing and seeing dance (Machado and Nilsen 2015).

Aesthetics are a focus of CanDoCo’s work and they de-face ‘disability specific styles’. The aesthetic ‘defacing’ is inferred by the suggestion that the company ‘locates disabled dancers in the landscape of contemporary dance choreography’, the suggestion here being that the landscape of contemporary dance choreography is not disability friendly unless it is altered to include disability. CanDoCo engages contemporary forms of aesthetic idealism in order to develop ways of understanding bodies with disabilities that are not confined to medical knowledges. As McCarren (1998: 15) explains: ‘Because it performs bodiliness, dance exists in close proximity to the idealism projected onto it, to the concept of the pathological that subsects it in the nineteenth century, and to the concept of idea pathology developed from it’. Dance, by its very nature, needs to deface medical codings of bodies, and integrated dance theatre needs to deface disability, rebuilding new aesthetic systems of relation. This argument is also expressed by co-founder of CanDoCo, Adam Benjamin, in his reflections on the 2004 publication of the second edition of the Oxford Dictionary of Dance. Benjamin explains:

2004 saw the publication of the second edition of The Oxford Dictionary of Dance. Although new headlines of ‘sport’ and ‘shoes’ were added, ‘disability’ remained conspicuous in its absence. In 1990 this might have been something we would have been rather proud of, believing at the time that there was no need to mention ‘disability’ to describe what we were doing, and that a disabled person being part of a dance company should not merit any particular mention. At that time I wrote that we only needed to use the word ‘integrated’ to describe what we did because we lived in a society that was in so many ways ‘dis’ integrated (Benjamin 2010: 119).

As Benjamin so astutely identifies, disability shapes dance, it changes what dance can do and how it speaks through aesthetics. A clear example of this can be found in Hetain Patel’s 2014 work for the company, ‘Let’s Talk about Dis’. Through spoken word, sign language, dance, vocal percussion and song, the show explores the paradoxes of political correctness that often accompany disability. Partly, the performers draw our attention to the fact that ‘political correctness’ often limits the ways in which disability is represented. They re-present disability, or as McRuer (2006) would say, ‘crip’ dominant discourses of disability. Through stories of embodiment, as well as performances of what their bodies ‘can do’ the ‘Let’s Talk about Dis’ cast humorously and athletically challenge dominant discourses of disability through naming them, and showing the audience they are other than these names. I want to suggest that such dominant discourses can be seen as vehicles for making social faces, or dominant ways of reading disability. In order to analyse the processes of facilitation, or making faces, effected by medical discourses of intellectual disability, I now think through some critical perspectives on the fact that medical knowledges become the primary way social faces for people with intellectual disability are made.

Invisible Authorities: Making ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ bodies

As technical, discursive systems, medical discourses of the body have been developed to code and alter physical bodies. Such knowledges constitute ideas about how the human body is ‘supposed’ to be configured and the ways it ‘should’ work. These ideas can be implicit, perhaps because medical discourses do not act primarily as tools for thinking. They are tools for fixing. In undertaking processes of repair, the nature(s) of the bodies that medical discourses mend are imagined on terms established by (and within) medical discourses. The outcome of these processes is a facilitation of the body: a system of signs and significances in which corporeality is captured and through which the body is known. The categories used for defining intellectual disability outline ways a body is classed as ‘disabled’ if it differs from a constructed template of the ‘normal’ human body. This fiction of a normal human body is imagined through medical mappings of corporeality. For example,
medical frameworks for Down syndrome are laid out, or constructed in relation to, a ‘majoritarian’ community demographic. The majoritarian (average, standardised) is a demographic not measured by physical mass, but by cultural power. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 291) describe the exemplar of majoritarian community, as ‘man’; the molar entity par excellence. This description is a culturally imagined, virtual human template, in relation to which the majoritarian standpoint as a primary position of reference is justified. The molar itself is a cultural imagining, a collective of power rather than a physical mass. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 291) elaborate through suggesting:

When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. It is not a question of knowing whether there are more mosquitoes or flies than men, but of knowing how ‘man’ constituted a standard in the universe in relation to which men necessarily (analytically) form a majority … the majority in the universe assumes as a pregiven the right and power of man.

This quote explains the majoritarian position as one which constitutes an analytic majority and which is assumed as a benchmark for the ‘power of man’ (1987: 291). This incorporeal body of power is the analytic position of ‘average’, ‘standardised’ and ‘normal’. The majoritarian standard of ‘a normal human’ is reflexively constructed through establishing borders between ‘man’ (the average or normal) and an ‘other’. By codifying a normal human body, medical discourses also broadly articulate what a majoritarian body is not (for example, intellectually disabled):

Two of the most common genetically transmitted forms of mental retardation are Down syndrome (a chromosomal disorder) and fragile X syndrome (a single-gene disorder). Chromosomal disorders affect about 7 out of 1000 infants. Single-gene disorders affect about 1 in 1500 births. More than 750 genetic disorders have been identified that cause mental retardation (Davis 1997).

In the above quote the word disorder is used five times in four sentences. This quote offers an excellent example of how a majoritarian standard of the human body is constructed against and through terms such as ‘retardation’ and ‘disorder’. This negative logic is the mode of operation used by many medical research projects. It is the very visible ‘invisible authority’ of knowledge about disability with which school teachers are repeatedly called to engage.

As a method of practice and an accompanying system of thought, medical discourses have valid and contextually specific purposes. However, medical systems of knowledge should not be regarded as offering an exhaustive or exclusive way of thinking about, and teaching, people with disabilities. Indeed, the idea that there is only one system of thought that is the ‘right way’ to think about anything seems limiting. Despite this, medical systems of knowledge have been globally adopted as dominant cultural paradigms for thinking about bodies (Harding 1991) and medical discourses of intellectual disability have become cultural habits for thinking about certain kinds of bodies. These mindsets can inhibit the observation of the way bodies can work, what they can become and how they can move us to feel.

While definitions of disability, such as the W.H.O. global categorisation discussed earlier, can be adaptable and highly necessary political tools, the enterprise of defining communities and individuals in relation to their functional limits is ethically problematic. Through adopting social faces and associated imaginaries made in medical discourses, social faces become synonymous with strategically defined limits. Broadly applicable definitions of disability, as well as quite specific definitions modelled around personal limitations, have pragmatic utility but they also constitute opinions that significantly shape the ways people with intellectual disability can be known. Indeed, as a way of developing an invisible authority, or majoritarian standpoint, medical discourses construct inherently different bodies (e.g. no two cells are literally identical) as being the same. Such comparison also constructs the ideal of a normal human body. The construction of an ideal, normal body allows for the symbiotic development of its binary opposite, the abnormal and in this instance, disabled body.2 As Diprose (1995) suggests, and as is posited by genetic theory and medical discourses more broadly, medical knowledges do not actively engage with anything other than themselves. In suggesting that ‘genetics, as theory, has no ethics’, Diprose (1995: 168) highlights the symbiotic relationship between genetic theory and genes (the products of genetic theory) and the lack of relationship between genetic theories and other knowledge systems.

Models of knowledge that operate through negative definitions of, and abstracted definitive positions on, the human body have become the primary way students with intellectual disabilities are known in schools. They are dominant public pedagogies of disability. As such, medical discursive constructions of a normal human body – and the limits placed on thinking embodied differences by such discourses – can both be read as discursive markers of the unthought. Taking the political work of integrated dance theatre seriously is one way that we can model new knowledge systems for understanding intellectual...
defaces medical black holes of disabled subjectification and moves bodies towards, and in, aesthetic communities in ways that can celebrate difference. Such dance works can be considered critical public pedagogies of inclusive education — texts that offer new ways of thinking and feeling about people with disabilities. The bodies on stage in CanDoCo and Restless performances are notably different from the popular imaginary of a ‘dancing body’. Performers use prosthetics, wheelchairs, and move in all kinds of ways. Such a diversity of embodiment can teach an appreciation for the varied forms bodies take and the specificity of the aesthetics of embodiment such diverse bodies bring. Reading the biographies for dancers in CanDoCo, the dancers are often able to talk about how the process of coming to be a dancer has also involved explicitly negotiating embodiment. This negotiation is arguably a core aspect of any dancer’s learning process, yet the explicit discussion of experimenting with different bodies — with chairs, crutches, an amputated limb — is a body pedagogy that is unusual to hear, see and read about. Dancers might speak of the work of making their body fit a certain shape, or learning what to make their body become, but this is radically different from the project of learning how to be a body differently through your disability.

It is not a huge leap from here, then, to imagine the kinds of learning about one’s own body, other people’s bodies, and the nature of embodiment, that can be facilitated through integrated dance theatre practice in schools. As the work of Restless shows us, integrated dance can be a way of ‘non-disabled’ people learning to fit in with people with disability. More than this, and as CanDoCo shows us, integrated dance can be a very particular way of learning to be a body, by learning from the body. Integrated dance offers us a critical public pedagogy of disability.

Dance theatre, such as the work of CanDoCo and Restless, defaces medical black holes of disabled subjectification and the bleed of medical terms into vernacular normal body is not a singular, corporeal active agent per of many different human bodies. Although this imagined as much as it is constructed through medical analyses The normal body imagined within contemporary medical education — texts that offer new ways of thinking and feeling about people with disabilities. The bodies on stage in CanDoCo and Restless performances are notably different from the popular imaginary of a ‘dancing body’. Performers use prosthetics, wheelchairs, and move in all kinds of ways. Such a diversity of embodiment can teach an appreciation for the varied forms bodies take and the specificity of the aesthetics of embodiment such diverse bodies bring. Reading the biographies for dancers in CanDoCo, the dancers are often able to talk about how the process of coming to be a dancer has also involved explicitly negotiating embodiment. This negotiation is arguably a core aspect of any dancer’s learning process, yet the explicit discussion of experimenting with different bodies — with chairs, crutches, an amputated limb — is a body pedagogy that is unusual to hear, see and read about. Dancers might speak of the work of making their body fit a certain shape, or learning what to make their body become, but this is radically different from the project of learning how to be a body differently through your disability.

Dance as an Inclusive Public Pedagogy

Dance teaches through asignifying affects. An asignifying affect is a bodily change or feeling that has no abstract meaning — it does not ‘signify’ anything — for example illness or disability — it just is a change or a feeling. Integrated dance theatre, such as the work of CanDoCo, that resituates the contexts in which people with disabilities are seen, makes asignifying affects that are feelings made by ‘disabled’ bodies but are not aligned to medical readings of disability. They are new cultural geographies of disability. Medical discourses have been developed in order to shape the physical world rather than conceptualise difference. As such, medical knowledges of disability, and specifically of intellectual disability, constitute a very limited binary system. Diprose’s (1995) work on genetics and ethics helps us to render transparent the self-defining nature of medical knowledges.

In identifying some limits of medical discourses, I have also examined some of the ways medical discourses construct the intellectually disabled body as being abnormal. I have explored definitions of intellectual disability constructed by local and global disability organisations and contrasted these medical constructions of the intellectually disabled body with constructions of ‘normality’ evident in medical knowledges that inform systems of schooling and dominant discourses of disability education. I have also argued that the idea of intellectual disability, developed within a medical discursive terrain, has operated as a public pedagogy of disability and thus gained a vast amount of social power because it is an easily transferable majoritarian opinion.

The normal body imagined within contemporary medical discourses constitutes a majoritarian analytic position. This position is not actualised in the body of a human being as much as it is constructed through medical analyses of many different human bodies. Although this imagined normal body is not a singular, corporeal active agent per se, it holds much power. This power is attributed to the imagined normal body through the medical discourses that construct it and the bleed of medical terms into vernacular and popular discourses. They are mutually constitutive.

References


Disability Information Resource Centre (DIRC) 2001

End Notes
1. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 291) use the word ‘man’ here to suggest that a majority of cultural power is held by men. The reference to ‘man; the molar entity par excellence’ is facetious; a parody of the assumed righteousness which can accompany positions of power.
2. There are paradoxes surrounding knowledge, knowledge production, and ‘good’ and ‘bad’ knowledges that are suggested through the juxtaposition of intellectually disabled bodies and normal bodies. These connections are beyond the scope of this paper and clearly warrant further research in this field.

Crossings
tar river cuts in two
on the other side
the path rolls beyond sight lines,
choose here:
one place of living or the other
skies watch
wait for the turn-back
breezes pass over
play grasses on their way
trailing spoors
scars mark the routes
to and from,
yet hunger bites and pushes the crossing

little external damage
organs beaten
still

Claire Rosslyn Wilson,
Barcelona, Catalonia/Windsor, VIC

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Where is Our Motherland Heading?

In these terrible lonely nights
I hear them whispering. Then – GINGG
GINGGGGGggggggggggggggggggggggg!
Another bomb.

What they plan secretly
makes me tremble.
To avoid worrying
I keep my eyes closed tightly.

The sky is a devil
who roars with thunder:
Don't open your eyes.
Don't try to hear our whispers.
Don't try to interpret our plans.

I question my mother often:
Mader, who have you introduced me to?
and where are they leading us?
Shhhhhh! Mother pleads.
Hugs me and puts me to sleep in her lap.
I feel her tears as they fall,
hear fear in her heartbeat.
Bachaim, my son, be quiet! Be quiet.

Just wait for the sun.

The News, Pontville Tasmania, 6 October 2011

As I wake from sleep
I find that yesterday's feelings I keep.
Then many friends were released, and I'm glad
but my own longing for freedom is biting me bad.
How will I pass the time today?
In a Detention Centre, every day is a 'holiday'.

I decide on the Library. There Irma Madam is sitting.
She asks, 'Can you bring me some more writing?'
I'm not in the mood to fetch my poetry now
But since it's her wish, to that I'll bow.
On the way to my room I pass the Centre's case managers;
Ian's caught up so I greet Alexandra.
This social worker asks, 'What's making you sad?'
Is my sorrow engraved on my forehead?

I explain all the reasons I'm feeling fragile
then Ian taps my shoulder and holds up my file.
'No no! Say nothing! There'll be no good news for me.'
He smiles and shrugs, 'As you please. Why not see?'
'Sorry for my words, tell me what I must hear.'
'Your security check is done – you're in the clear.'
I close my eyes and breathe a deep sigh.
No more failures, I think, I'm going to get by.

Omid,
Canberra ACT
[From Afghanistan, Formerly in Australian refugee detention facilities]

Dedicated to those kind people Who inspired me to continue: my fellow-detainees, the volunteers who helped me with English, and some of the staff.
Style, Stage Presence, and the Poetic Subversion of Stereotypes:
A case study of Blue Roo Theatre Company

BREE HADLEY AND CLARK CRYSTAL

In this article, we consider the work of Blue Roo Theatre Company, a Brisbane-based theatre company which ‘creates contemporary performances led by the artistry, experiences and imaginations of an ensemble of artists with diverse ability and impairment’ (Blue Roo Theatre Company). Writing from a dual insider-outsider perspective – as a scholar of disability theatre and a creator of disability theatre in conversation – we discuss the work done in the training and rehearsal room in the lead up to the company’s performances, and the way it creates a distinctive performance style, poetics, stage presence, pleasure for the spectators who come along to witness the results of the work, and sense of community. We document moments in which facilitators, collaborators, co-creating artists, audiences and the media alike feel the physical, psychological, and aesthetic focus and force of voice. Movement and character are made to work by people with disabilities. In doing so, we provide insights into the Blue Roo Theatre Company’s processes, and the aesthetic results it produces, and the way it contributes to a growing body of commentary around disability theatre and performance.

Introduction

In the past decade there has been a rapid increase in interest in the theatre practices of disabled people, particularly in the theatre practices of intellectually disabled people, in Australia, and around the world. The practices of disabled people working independently, in ensembles, and in community, experimental, and mainstage theatre contexts have been recognised as critical to efforts to create a culture that represents us as equal members of society. It is an area of theatre work to which many disabled artists, activists, scholars, and their allies are committed. It is also an area of theatre work that remains complex, and contested, as those involved navigate the legacies of exclusion, marginalisation, and monsterisation that mark disabled people’s historical experience of theatre practices.

In this article, we want to reflect on the work of one inclusive theatre company committed to challenging this history of exclusion – Blue Roo Theatre Company. Described by Arts Queensland as ‘Brisbane’s premiere inclusive theatre troupe’ (Arts Queensland 2016), Blue Roo ‘creates contemporary performances led by the artistry, experiences and imaginations of an ensemble of artists with diverse ability and impairment’. Emerging from a one-off drama workshop, Artistic Director Clark Crystal delivered for 25 clients of Centacare Disability Services’ HAND learning and leisure centre in 2009. Blue Roo has been welcomed in a city where opportunities for disabled people to participate in the performing arts have been limited. The company now delivers a number of weekly drama sessions in a number of styles including dance, drama, melodrama, and Commedia dell’Arte to meet increasing demand. In 2010, Blue Roo began a partnership with the Judith Wright Centre for Contemporary Arts to present an annual production created by core company members during their own dedicated weekly workshops throughout the year. In the years since, the company has produced a dozen productions, including Lily Pilly Letters (2009), Sugar Cane Ball (2010), The Last Night at the Grand (2011), Flood Country (2012), Capitano Pretends Again (2013), Darcy O and the Browbeat Factory (2013), Song Circle (2014) A Waddle of Ducks (2015), Hotel Pantelone (2015), and Three Times a Lady (2017). Most recently, Blue Roo has produced The Bulimba Opera (2015) and Orpheus and Eurydice (2016), a culmination of a three-year partnership with Opera Queensland, presented at the Judith Wright Centre last year.

What makes Blue Roo distinctive in the broader landscape of inclusive theatre companies in Australia is its commitment to working with a variety of theatrical styles, with a large and largely open ensemble, towards a professional performance outcome in a mainstage...
venue at the end of every year. Artistic Director Clark Crystal trained with renowned physical theatre practitioner Philippe Gaulier, and worked as inaugural artistic director of Scotland’s Lung Ha’s Inclusive Theatre Company for many years, as well as with other companies in the UK, Europe, Africa, America, and Asia, before beginning the collaboration with the members of Blue Roo. Other voice coaches, choreographers, and musicians involved in the company – such as Brian Lucas, Libby MacDonnell, and Jason Barry-Smith – have experience in an equally wide range of theatrical styles. This is reflected in the way Blue Roo members work to produce a distinctive stage presence, persona, voice, and energy in their work.

In this article, we want to unpack the way this distinctive approach contributes to the style, poetics, stage presence, and pleasure of Blue Roo’s work for the spectators who come along to witness it at the Judith Wright Centre and other locations around the state. We discuss the work the ensemble members perform in training, rehearsal, and production development to establish this distinctive style and stage presence. We then offer an analysis of why Blue Roo’s emphasis on working with a range of theatrical styles works to expand representations of disabled people, and in particular representations of intellectually disabled people, for its spectators. In a context where approaches that draw exclusively on a conventional dramatic aesthetic and on a contemporary post-dramatic aesthetic have both been criticised for their potential to reiterate problematic depictions of disabled people, Blue Roo’s approach offers another option. Drawing on an evaluation of the company’s recent performance of *Orpheus and Eurydice* in collaboration with Opera Queensland produced by Culture Counts, we provide insight into how Blue Roo’s work is read and experienced by spectators. We reflect on the way collaboration with a growing community of spectators is as critical as collaboration within the company in Blue Roo’s efforts to change conventional readings of disability on Brisbane’s theatre stages.

Methodologically, the analysis we offer here is based on conversation, dialogue, and debate from a dual insider-outsider perspective, from a creator and a scholar of disability theatre, a non-disabled person and a disabled person, an artist and a spectator. The need for self-reflexivity on the part of artists, activists, and researchers working with disabled people, to ensure they are not advancing their own interests by exploiting us or taking up leadership positions in the arts or in the academy at our expense, has been recognised since Michael Oliver’s advocacy in this area two decades ago (1990, 1991, 1996). This does not mean that allies need to abandon their work. In a context where the voices of allies still often draw more attention than the voices of artists, activists, and scholars with disabilities themselves, removing their voice would only further marginalise disabled people in mainstream debates. It does, however, mean dialogue about what Giles Perring (2005: 177) describes as the artistic, cultural, and political intent of both disabled and non-disabled people must remain part of the day-to-day work to avoid positioning disabled people as passive clients occasionally called on to answer interview questions to help non-disabled people confirm the validity of their work (cf. Perring 2005: 175-176; Leighton 2009: 98; Conroy 2009: 9). The dialogic approach to developing this article – and the analysis in it, which comes from two people, with two perspectives, recognising the role all parties have to play in understanding the work, as well as the risk of misreadings in a culture where disabled people are still too often cast as childlike beings in need of care – is designed to try to embody the results of the reciprocal reflection Oliver sees as critical when disabled and non-disabled people work together (1996: 141).

Reading Disability Theatre (in the voice of the disability theatre scholar)

As noted at the outset, there has been a lot of interest in performance with and by people with disabilities in the last decade (Hadley 2014; Johnston 2012; Kuppers 2003, 2011; Davidson 2008; Kochhar-Lindgren 2006; Lewis 2006; Sandahl and Auslander 2005). In particular, there has been a lot of interest in performance with and by people with intellectual disabilities (Hargrave 2015; McCaffrey 2015; Umathum and Wihstutz 2015; Grehan and Eckersall 2013; Hickey-Moody 2009). In theatre, as in so many spheres of social life, including disabled people – challenging traditionally problematic theatrical depictions of disabled people as innocent, childlike, inspirational, or monstrous – has been a subject of celebration, controversy, and, at times, confusion.

On the one hand, there are to this day commentators who continue to question whether disabled people are capable of creating quality work (cf. Coslovich 2011). Their questions relate not just to conceptual or creative ability, but to performance ability – stage presence, persona, and the power to pull spectators into a story being staged. They worry that disabled performers lack the technical proficiency, precision, and presence to create quality work. Matt Hargrave, who has written extensively about inclusive theatre companies such as Shysters, Mind the Gap, and Back-to-Back, cites DV8 Artistic Director Lloyd Newson’s comments about the need to ensure disabled performers are good, and technically precise, to avoid ‘demeaning the art form’ (Hargrave 2009: 37-38). This questioning of capacity is a particular problem for intellectually disabled performers, who are stereotypically seen as having unfocused, undisciplined, childlike qualities that make it hard for them to develop a powerful stage presence. This reading is based, as Jane Goodall (2008: 9) indicates, on twentieth century understandings of stage presence,
which prioritise training, technique, and discipline to produce the transcendental quality that in previous centuries had been read in terms of a charismatic aura available to a talented few. The dominant Western view has traditionally been that developing a stage presence depends on a performer’s ability to exercise control over the real space-time of the stage and represented space-time of the story, and the relation between the two, so the former does not disrupt, interrupt, or interfere with the latter – or, more precisely, the spectators’ ability to form a rapturous identification with the characters, scenarios, and social frameworks presented in the latter (Goodall 2008: 15). The performer trains to become adept at ‘enacting a drama in the dual timeframe through which an audience experiences it: the fictional present within the narrative, and the social here and now of the performance’ (Goodall 2008: 9). However, as Hargrave (2009: 37-38) and others have noted, commentators doubt disabled people’s conceptual, psychological, and physical capacity to exercise such control over their own bodies. They doubt that disabled bodies can disappear into the fiction the way able bodies do for most spectators, and, of course, presume that most spectators are not disabled and have limited relationships with disabled people in their day-to-day lives.

On the other hand, of course, there are artists, commentators, and academics who are excited by the challenges disabled performers present to conventional concepts of theatre. Aligned with the modern and postmodern theatrical approaches Hans Thies Lehmann (2006) calls ‘post dramatic’ – a set of approaches that both stage and subvert traditional dramatic techniques through fragmentation, repetition, commentary and other conventions – such commentators are suspicious of historical notions of stage presence. They argue that so-called ‘good’ stage presence traps spectators into identification with, and the power dynamics in, the illusions staged, even when they are ableist, sexist, racist, or otherwise oppressive to so many of us in an audience that is not always composed of white, straight, able-bodied men. ‘The suspicion of presence and of simple presentation of performer to audience that suffuses postmodern experimental theatre derives, then,’ as Philip Auslander argues, ‘from the anxiety created by historical demonstrations of collusion between presence as charisma or salesmanship and repressive power structures’ (1997: 63). To subvert this construction and communication of conventional power structures, post-dramatic performance makers make theatre that shows its own constructedness, and shows the power structures that subtend everything a socially constructed character thinks, says, or does onstage. This allows spectators to see and identify with the illusion, but also see the illusion as a constructed ideal they can challenge if they suspect it is serving dominant culture powerholders.

Many post-dramatic theatre makers, from Robert Wilson to Jerome Bel, have suggested that the different ways of thinking, speaking, and being embodied by disabled people deconstruct these sorts of theatrical illusions. For such performance makers, collaborating with disabled performers has become a critical part of their work. These collaborations have allowed them to take advantage of what Hargrave (2009: 41), following Susan Sontag (1999), describes as spectators’ socially-trained tendency to see disabled performers work ‘in quotes’, as an example of a person attempting to become an actor attempting to become a character, which fails to disappear into theatrical illusion. This ‘in quotes’ quality creates what Lehmann would call a tension, or an uncertainty, that spectators can find just as captivating as conventional dramatic performance – albeit for different reasons. This tension, which Hargrave characterises in terms of ‘little tear marks in the performance where the audience is able to see the joins’ (2009: 42), can be new, fascinating, frustrating, captivating, and give spectators a sense that they are getting a ‘glimpse of “selves” so often marginalised from our stages or screens’ (2009: 52), and/or a glimpse of a whole new set of potentials for stage and screen practice in the future.

In many ways, these two readings of the stage presence, persona, and power of disabled performers are two sides of the same coin. They point to the problem of the spectator, and the way the spectator has been taught to read disabled bodies, and the way the spectator is always presumed to be a non-disabled person reading a disabled body in both dramatic and post-dramatic paradigms as one of the most critical for disability theatre artists, activists, and scholars. The presence of disabled bodies onstage in dramatic and post-dramatic performance creates what Jim Ferris calls an ‘aesthetic anxiety’ (Ferris 2005: 58; cf. Hargrave 2009: 43), which influences spectators’ readings of the performance, and of the disabled bodies in the performance. Accordingly, as Colette Conroy says, reimagining spectatorship remains ‘one of the central tasks identified by makers of disability arts and disability theatre’ (2009: 8). As Fran Leighton (2009: 101) indicates, representations of disabled people in dramatic theatre and post-dramatic theatre can both result in aesthetic anxiety, and, as a result, in continued othering of disabled people, as well as othering of those members of the audience who might identify as disabled. Casting disabled people as realistic characters, in conventional plays, where those who can learn lines, can encourage spectators to read them mainly in terms of dominant culture definitions of the normal. Casting disabled people as non-realistic characters, in fairy tales, fantasies, and pantomimes, can encourage spectators to read them mainly in terms of dominant culture definitions of non-normalcy as childlike, innocent, inspirational, or monstrous. However, casting disabled people as
themselves in post-dramatic performances – for example, Jerome Bel and Theater Hora’s Disabled Theatre – can encourage spectators to read them as ‘special’ in spite of their inability to play or inhabit roles other than their own selves. These representations can reinforce non-disabled spectators’ tendency to label disabled people as readily as it can interrupt it, and continue to ignore the presence of disabled people within the spectator group. In this context, Dave Calvert argues, there is still a need to make more space for disabled people to perform ‘fluid, changing or even contradictory identities’ (Calvert 2009: 77). There is a need, Leighton (2009: 105-106) agrees, to make more space for disabled people to perform these fluid, changing, and even contradictory identities in training, in rehearsal, and in performance. Seeing more disabled people, performing more roles, in more styles, where the poetics of subversion is more fluid, changing, and contradictory, has the potential to shift audiences out of current culturally ingrained habits when it comes to reading disability onstage.

Reading Blue Roo Theatre Company (in the voice of the disability theatre creator)

Blue Roo is cognisant of the challenges of creating a space, and a performance style, sensibility, and poetics, in which both disabled and non-disabled spectators can read disabled people differently. In their practice, empowering company members to perform a range of roles and styles, which mesh to produce a range of poetics from each production – enabling performers to show their capacity to switch styles – is critical.

As noted at the outset, Blue Roo is an inclusive theatre company. The members include people with intellectual disabilities, as well as people with physical disabilities, and their allies. Working in a vibrant/working theatre company, the members consistently strive to create new work that both complements and showcases the members’ skills and abilities. Blue Roo engages all members of the company as co-creating artists. All take responsibility for establishing a creative environment where they can celebrate and nurture performance abilities, and experience the pleasure, joy, and power that comes with growth as a performer, whilst maintaining mutual respect. The company members all share responsibility for driving the artistic vision and agenda. The discussions evolve around the programming of future productions. Given Blue Roo’s foundations, conversations about disabled people and performances about issues that affect disabled people have always had a place in the work. Through these discussions, Blue Roo members have created at least two productions that illustrate the impact of disability on the ensemble and their lives. One production, Darcy O and the Browbeat Factory (2013), addresses bullying of disabled people. Another production, Song Circle (2014), celebrates the ensemble’s passion for singing, disability, and independence. This said, disability issues are not the only factor driving the company’s decision making. Their decisions come out of conversations about a combination of factors. This includes conversations about content, and style, and what the ensemble wants to create as a collective, any potential challenges with a project, as well as the artists the company wants to invite to collaborate. For example, their current Three Times a Lady (2017) project came about when founding Blue Roo choreographer Libby MacDonnell wanted to create a dance piece that included the women of the company to celebrate what Calvert might call their ‘fluid, changing or even contradictory’ Down syndrome identities (Calvert 2009: 77). The women of the company considered it a wonderful idea, so the company responded to that reaction, and the piece is now coming to fruition. In this sense, the company sees each project as coming from a massive jigsaw of potential pieces, with running conversations required to see each project take a specific shape. The professionalised approach and expectations of all company members is critical to creating a celebration of conceptual, theatrical, and collaborative skill that will translate on to a stage in front of an audience.

Within these guiding principles, the style of Blue Roo’s work – in workshops, in rehearsals, and in performances – can be wide-ranging. The company embraces styles such as melodrama, tragedy, clown, and Commedia dell’Arte, and has also recently included new media production in its work. It regularly invites local artists to collaborate. Each artist brings specific skills, so Blue Roo members can focus on these specific skills to help create a specific style of stage presence as part of a specific project. In the recent collaboration with Opera Queensland, for example, Brian Lucas was invited to assist company members in experimenting with physical theatre skills, whilst the singers and musicians who would eventually join the company on stage continued to provide opportunities in these areas. The benefit of this approach, for Blue Roo, is that it enables them to create different styles, personas, and stage presences as articulated below – within each performer, amongst the performers, within each performance, and amongst the performances.

This approach to developing diverse new skills sits inside a familiar formative structure. The Blue Roo process starts with weekly workshops of traditional and non-traditional European theatre practices – from games of the sort advocated by Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone, to commedia and clown, Greek drama, to Opera, representational theatre, choreography, and beyond. Each session starts in a circle, with up to a minutes’ stillness and silence. The company then welcome themselves with applause. After this, a conversation allows each company member to speak about anything,
be it joys, concerns, or anything else that comes to mind. It is a democratic open forum. This encourages communication, challenges shyness, and builds on projection and voice quality. In this, as in all parts of the making process, company members take responsibility for ‘pushing the story along’ with their own distinctive storytelling abilities. Everyone is listened to, and heard, as they make their own artistic contribution to the story unfolding. Once the circle is concluded, the company start the theatre work. Theatre games are a critical tool in translating rehearsal training into a performance context. Theatre games create a playing tension, concentration, focus, and an atmosphere that can be interpreted as a performance without a separate paying audience present.

The company reinvents specific games to suit their own needs, interests, and skills. The games include individual text, or chorus text, or chorus movement of the play the company is rehearsing. The company then splits into small groups to discuss and record all ideas and suggestions coming up during the making process. This enables content, styles, and, themes to evolve, and connections to emerge, as questions about the what, where, when, how, and why of the performance the company is improvising slowly leads to answers. Again, the company sees this as parts of a jigsaw puzzle – storyline, structure, content, and style – assembling into a clear shape, albeit an emergent shape that can change from season to season and show to show as the company evolves.

The storytelling, acting, singing, and dancing skills developed through this process – the skills necessary to communicate through these artforms when the process gives way to the performance itself – are never undervalued, or overlooked, but they are adapted. This is essential in eventually enabling both non-disabled and disabled spectators to see beyond the fact that people with an intellectual disability are there on stage in front of them, and thus see beyond stereotypical notions of ‘normalcy’ or ‘specialness’. The approach, overall, enables the company members to develop their capacity for focus, concentration, and complicity with each other in chorus, as well as in improvised scenes and characters. Hence, there is a capacity for focus that spectators – at least those culturally trained to question intellectually disabled performers’ technical proficiency, precision, and presence – do not necessarily expect to see from people with intellectual disabilities. The results of this process came out clearly in the recent Blue Roo and Opera Queensland co-production of Orpheus and Eurydice. Working together over three years provided a platform for massive growth, which, for the company, felt something like the actor training conservatories traditionally closed to intellectually disabled people. The quality of focus and concentration onstage, as much as the quality of the singing, allowed the company members to convey a stage presence – and, indeed, a multivalent stage presence. This shifted from the

Verfremdungseffekt (distancing effect) of the Brechtian-derived and alienatory stage presence common to some post-dramatic theatre, to the more authenticity driven stage presence common to other forms of post-dramatic theatre, to the disciplined stage presence common to dramatic theatre, to moments of sustained precision of focus that cultural training of spectators tries to suggest is not possible from intellectually disabled people. In this sense, Blue Roo’s approach allowed for the projection of fluid, flexible, multiplicitous, changing, and even contradictory stage presences that showed spectators the capacity of the disabled performers – beyond the binary of simply performing a role and/or simply performing themselves, could not. A feature of the company’s poetics in Orpheus and Eurydice, would not have been possible without the company’s prior attention to training in multiple styles to produce multivalent stage presences. Artistically, the company saw it as a successful investment, and one it will build on this year as it returns to devising and improvising its own stories.

The potential of Blue Roo’s approach lies in its ability to produce performances that embody fluid, flexible, changing, and even contradictory stage presences – from distraction, to discipline, to precision focus, in each performer, and in the ensemble of performers – that challenge the traditionally limited readings of intellectually disabled performers. Though this shifting positionality may be more evident in rehearsal than any single, specific performance a spectator might see, it does still come through, and come through in different ways in different productions Blue Roo’s community of spectators come along to see. This approach allows company members to present their capacity to portray many qualities, beyond simply trying to overcome the limits of their own bodies, mimic mainstage performers, or manifest a version of themselves onstage. The performance outcome remains critical, because, as Nicola Hatton (2009: 93) has argued, the absence of such an outcome would leave disability theatre in a service paradigm rather than an arts paradigm, without the chance to engage with a community of spectators. Building this community of spectators, and seeking their feedback on style, persona, and stage presences, remains essential to Blue Roo’s work.

Reading Together (and reflecting on the role of the Blue Roo Theatre Company community)

Blue Roo creates an environment in which the creative and learning experience is reciprocal for the company members, the facilitators, the local artists invited to participate in specific projects, and the family, friends, and spectators that form its broader community. The artists and the audiences both report feeling the physical, psychological, and aesthetic focus and force of voice, movement and character work by people with
disabilities. Company members report feeling pride in their achievement. Facilitators, support workers, and volunteers – who see the work up close, in the micro-environment of the rehearsal room, as well as in production – report that they observe the growth of company members. That is, they observe confidence, self-esteem development, reduction in shyness and anxiety, and ability to expand conversations and creative communications. The local artists enjoy the energy and enthusiasm of the company, and the pleasure of harnessing this energy in improvisations, rehearsals, and public performances, as part of the creative process. The family, friends, and spectators that form Blue Roo’s broader community, including funding agencies and the local media, consistently respond positively to the work, even if responses from the media tend to be harder to shift from the stereotypes about specialness discussed earlier than responses from other audience segments. The company now regularly sell out 100% of their house capacity. The Culture Counts evaluation of Orpheus and Eurydice, extrapolated from responses provided by 36% of the 600+ audience plus three peer reviewers – half of whom had attended disability theatre before (55%), half of whom had attended Blue Roo’s disability theatre before (48%), spread across age groups (<19 = 6%, 20-29 = 18%, 30-39 = 15%, 40-49 = 10%, 50-59 = 24%, >60 = 27%), though with a slight dominance of women respondents (68%) – showed 82% of spectators rated their experience of work as excellent. The public described the performance as one that captured their attention, moved them, and inspired them, by saying something about today’s world, with theatrical rigour. They were ‘impressed with the competency and cohesion of the group’ (Culture Counts 2016), as one put it. The peers appreciated the connections made in the work amongst diverse artists. Both the public and the peers recognised the way the work helped connect people in the local community. ‘There is an inexplicable lift that is experienced after attending a Blue Roo production’ (Clarke n.d.), theatre reviewer Sonny Clarke suggested, describing the community sensibility created in and around the auditorium. This lift – the stage presence, style, and poetics that create this lift – is as critical as the content of the show in subverting dominant depictions of people with intellectual disabilities as innocent, childlike, or inspirational. This is because the energy of the lift is shared and negotiated between stage and spectator, not simply directed from a presumed-to-be-able spectator onto a disabled performer the way that projections of inspirational status tend to be. The energised atmosphere in and after the show creates a palpable sense of excitement, adulation, pride, accomplishment, and achievement that includes both the company and the community of spectators. In this way, the confidence-building techniques the company uses have a ripple effect that reaches beyond the Blue Roo circle out into the community of spectators. Both report feeling pleasure at feeling the capacity of disabled people coming out in the work. They report wanting to see more of the work the company members do. This came out in the Culture Counts evaluation of the company’s Orpheus and Eurydice, with at least a few people saying they wanted to see more company members, in more varied roles, relationships, and interactions with fellow company members – diverse in range enough in themselves regardless of what they learn via their collaborations with other local artists – as the facet of the work that meant the most to them. Though this ‘lift’ is more ‘explicable’ to Blue Roo itself, having worked through training, theatrical, and representational techniques to create it, the fact that spectators label it this way suggests that they are happily surprised at disabled people activating the atmosphere, audience, and community in this way. A surprise that, in itself, signals how the company is working to create palpable changes to attitudes through its theatre.

Conclusion

By providing insights into Blue Roo’s processes and aesthetics in this article, our hope has been to contribute to a growing body of commentary around disability theatre. Though increasingly well understood by those working in form, disability theatre clearly can still provide surprises for audiences and commentators anticipating certain representations of disabled people onstage. On the one hand, as Gabriella Coslovich (2011) notes, commentators have questioned if people with disabilities, and in particular people with intellectual disabilities, have the capacity to create this work, and/or to understand what they have created, and thus act as true co-creators. On the other hand, artists and the scholars who study them have clearly demonstrated the power the distinct communication, acting, and aesthetic practices of people with disabilities can hold in a live performance context. As this analysis suggests, the challenge companies like Blue Roo accept in their work is that of showcasing the diverse range of stage presences, persona, and styles disabled people can present onstage. The challenge has been the avoiding of issues that focus entirely on fitting into either conventional dramatic definitions of stage presence and/or the contemporary post-dramatic definitions that stage presence can produce. And, more critically, the challenge of creating moments of surprise at the range and diversity of performers with intellectual disabilities, in themselves, in their relations with the ensemble, and in a series of different productions. These are surprises that help facilitators, support staff, family, friends, and spectators see disability identity in broader terms. For Blue Roo, creating a sense of community within a spectator group that keeps coming back, and contributes in its own way to the evolution of the work, is an important part of the process. Because this community is more likely to experience not just the initial excitement of seeing different performers onstage, but the effect of seeing them.
embody a diverse range of stage presences, persona, and styles, beyond the limited and limiting characteristics they are normally labelled with. In this respect, the community relationships – the community’s reading of the performers capacity to embody fluid, flexible, changing, and even contradictory capacities – become critical in challenging the discourses about technical mastery, talent, or transcendence that have often framed readings of disabled performers on the theatrical stage.

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when they hear you're shifting to old Bombay.

Trust our managerial grid. Your suckers in head office did. 
We motivated, they salivated and into our Karaoke web they slid. 
Swaying to our play sheet, mad as raving junk bond loons, 
they followed us, Hamlin-style, on a Wall Street bender, 
swiveling their hips to ‘Love me tender’ 
—high as futures on our helium tunes.

When we strafe you with our Dreamliner grins, 
you'll ache to believe we're about ‘win-wins.’ 
But deep down every one of you knows, 
our not so hidden global agenda 
is to be the slickest, richest peddler 
of the Managing Emperor's brand-new clothes.

ROGER VICKERY, 
HARBORD, NSW

double-length chain-link pin

steep climb 10 km out of Shoal Bay 
just before the top a lurch forward 
I recognise as a broken chain

bicycle chains are the dark technology of cycling 
tough metal precisely engineered 
you oil them to run smoothly 
but they pick up dirt from the road

working with a chain leaves your hands 
unwashable black.

i remember other broken chains 
you need to remove a link 
bring the two parts of the outer link 
two parts of the inner link 
the bush 
and the pin together 
then drive the pin home

a chain tool holds the parts 
but tolerances are so tight it takes twenty thirty 
goes to get everything aligned 
while you sweat 
curse 
and wipe your face 
to give yourself chain-grease eyelids

but i have brought a new item 
a double-length chain-link pin 
the pin has an extension a fraction thinner 
that holds all the parts in alignment

i slide the extension into place and 
drive the main pin home with my chain tool 
one turn per millimetre eight turns 
i snap off the extension and file the end smooth

two minutes

no frustration

cycling on I wonder if I could begin a sonnet

i love you as i love the double-length 
chain-link pin

RON HEARD, 
BRISBANE QLD
‘We Will Look After You’: Back to Back Theatre’s *Lady Eats Apple* and the promise of ‘the time after’ in the narratives of theatre involving actors with intellectual disabilities.

**Tony McCaffrey**

The article takes as its starting point ‘We will look after you’, a specific utterance and theatrical moment at the end of *Lady Eats Apple* by Back to Back Theatre insofar as these embody the potential aesthetic and political efficacies of the narrative strategies of recent theatre involving actors with intellectual disabilities. These narratives are first located within the context of the development of such theatre over the last fifty years and then within the particular processes of development of Back to Back Theatre as a company exploring the terms of the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière) of intellectual disability within contemporary theatrical performance, specifically in what might be termed the narrativity of post-dramatic theatre. An analysis is then offered of how *Lady Eats Apple* reconfigures what can be said, shown, felt and understood in such theatre through the disorientation of the senses of perception and location of the audience. The analysis concludes that the company’s aesthetic approach proves to be political in ‘the time after’ of performance, in its reconfiguration of assumed binaries of both the construction of the self as subject and of the relationship of care and dependence between people with and without disabilities.

People with intellectual disabilities are the subjects of many stories and discourses: in literature, poetry and cinema they have often been cast as personifications of difference or as metaphors for the unknowable, the unrepresentable or even the ineffable. In medical, educational and juridical discourses they have been cast as the subject of case histories, written about, diagnosed, or designated as a limit point of humanity, even to the point of being effaced or erased. More often than not they have been cast as subjects with little agency in how their stories are told or how their lives are allowed to unfold.

The relatively recent development of theatre involving people with intellectual disabilities appears to offer the possibility of more meaningful roles and greater access, participation and representation. Actors with intellectual disabilities have started to take their place centre stage: to occupy the stage, to play around in the space, to command attention; they have been given the chance to be spectacular, or to make spectacles of themselves. Actors with intellectual disabilities are not only taking their place on stage but they are increasingly participating in devising the stories, the characters and the staging, in choosing the words and the actions and other constituent elements of theatrical performance. Is theatre, therefore, a more democratic and accessible form of representation for people with intellectual disabilities, a place they may occupy as devisers, actors and, indeed, spectators? I wish to argue that it is, but only on theatre’s own terms, taking into account the singularities of theatricality as a medium (see Weber 2004).

Theatre is not an unproblematic, transparent medium of communication, neither does it guarantee an authenticity of presence. The theatre space or stage always looks to other spaces outside the theatre, often pointing up the spectacle and theatricality of what is to be found there. Theatricality also has a particular relationship with time, confounding the illusion of the theatrical now time of the story or the world of the performance with the reiterative process of rehearsal in the past. Theatre as citation and recitation – and with the potential for reiteration in the future – theatre as a prefiguring of social change, a possible rehearsing of a revolution.

I wish to investigate what can happen when people with intellectual disabilities take to the stage, when they enter into the particular space and time of theatricality. On what terms are they afforded access and representation and what might be the efficacy of their participation? In order to do this I wish to consider some specific moments in *Lady Eats Apple*, a recent production by Back to Back Theatre. I will first provide a brief context of the recent history of the involvement of people with intellectual
disabilities in the devising and performance of theatrical narratives. I will give an account of some of the previous work of Back to Back Theatre as this provides a crucial context for the post-dramatic strategies of theatrical narrativity at play in Lady Eats Apple. I will then offer an analysis of certain aspects of the production in terms of Rancière’s ‘distribution of the sensible’ (2012) showing how the political and aesthetic strategies of the production intertwine and interact in the disorientation of the audience’s senses of what it is they can see, what it is they can hear and where it is that they feel that they are. By doing so I wish to consider what the radical promise of this work is and why the efficacy of this promise should be located in a temporal and conceptual space Rancière (2013) has designated ‘the time after’.

‘We will look after you’: these are the words uttered at the end of Back to Back Theatre’s Lady Eats Apple. A group of performers with intellectual disabilities repeatedly makes this promise to a performer without disabilities, who is, in the context of one of the narrative strands of the piece, feigning disability. As this speech act (Austin 1976) occurs at the end of the performance, the promise may also be said to go out to the theatre audience, of whom the majority is likely to be people without intellectual disabilities. What might be the import of these words: in what way can people with intellectual disabilities look after those without such disabilities?

As these words are spoken in the context of a theatrical narrative, ‘We will look after you’ is more precisely, and confusingly, an enacting of a speech act and a performance of a performative utterance (Butler 1988). Should this promise be believed, taken at its face value? What is the status of this performative utterance issued from the stage, a site of utterance, that according to Austin, undermines the possibility of performativity as it is ‘in a peculiar way hollow or void’? (Austin 1976: 21-22). Theatre has a long and complex history as being both a space where the social order may be reimagined and as an untrustworthy location associated with make-believe and pretence. The deliberate indeterminacy of the status of the promise at the end of the performance epitomises the way in which Lady Eats Apple provokes a wider and more fundamental questioning of what is presented, what is represented and what is achieved when people with intellectual disabilities occupy the ambiguous and subjunctive (Lehmann 2006: 150) space of theatrical performance.

The actors with intellectual disabilities who appear on stage in Lady Eats Apple emerge out of a relatively recent history of disability theatre, a form that has arisen in the more general development of disability activism, arts and culture that has taken place in a number of countries in the second half of the twentieth century. Contemporary disability theatre could be said to trace its descent from nineteenth century freak shows (as outlined in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s landmark text in disability studies, Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body 1996) and, for example, from the theatrical activities of John Hayden Langdon Down (whose name was given to Down syndrome) at the Earlswood Asylum for Idiots. A delving further back into the lineage of this form of theatre might include accounts of village idiots and court jesters, performers marked by their precarity and stigmatisation. The notion of history is of course highly problematic in this area as any history will not be written by those whom it purports to represent. It is in many ways an impossible history, an account of an ‘oppressed past’ as Benjamin characterises it (Benjamin 1999: 257).

This is also, however, a theatre whose time appears to have come. Theatre companies involving people with intellectual disabilities in the contemporary period include Compagnie de l’Oiseau Mouche (France) founded in 1978, Graeae Theatre Company (UK) 1980, Theatre Terrific (Canada) 1985, Back to Back Theatre Company (Australia) 1987, Moomsteatern (Sweden) 1987, Mind The Gap (UK) 1988, Theater Maatwerk (Netherlands), 1989 Theater Rambazamba (Germany) 1990, Theater Hora (Switzerland) 1993. These companies themselves emerged out of a range of arts and disability practices that Perring in ‘The Facilitation of Learning Disabled Arts’ has categorised as ‘Normalizing ... Post-Therapeutic ... and Counter-Cultural’ (2005: 185-6). Normalising practices seek to give access to and include people with intellectual disabilities in theatre designed for an audience of the general public, the guiding ethos of which is professionalism. Such theatre generally uses pre-existing theatrical or fictional narratives and works within these narrative arcs, and concomitant arcs of characterisations, with the actors with learning disabilities, just as commercial theatre practice would with non-disabled actors.

The post-therapeutic strand operates within institutions and post-institutional organisations to a specialised and localised audience. The narrative strategy here is likely to be of a testimonial nature, drawn from the experience of the people with intellectual disabilities, often in the pursuance of the therapeutic practice of psychodrama or, particularly in the case of those deemed more profoundly intellectually disabled, occupational therapy. The aesthetic appeal of the performance to an audience is not a priority in such practice.

Finally, what Perring terms ‘counter-cultural’ practice seeks to challenge mainstream or hegemonic precepts and views about both ‘intellectual disability’ and ‘theatre’. In this strand of practice, narratives are likely to be constructed with as full and active participation by people with intellectual disabilities as possible, devised from their individual or group experiences.

This is a very schematic account of a much more diverse area of practice but it gives some idea of the main
imperatives driving recent theatre involving people with intellectual disabilities. Each of these imperatives in their own way is committed to different political meanings of inclusion, empowerment or equality for people with intellectual disabilities but each, up until now, have been led and facilitates by people without such disabilities.1

Alongside the development of such theatre a critical discourse has emerged in the press, amongst practitioners, and, in the academy, in the fields of disability studies and theatre and performance studies. The issues this discourse seeks to address include a questioning of the agency of the performers: do actors with intellectual disabilities only ever ‘play themselves’? (Hargrave 2009: 48) what kind of agency do they have in performance? (see the controversy over Jérôme Bel and Theater Hora’s Disabled Theater, Umatham and Wihstutz 2015). I would contend that these questions of agency are in fact projections of more widespread concerns with agency: of the constitution of the subject in processes of subjectivation in the postmodern or post-human moment.

One debate that is particularly pertinent to the work of Back to Back is a questioning of the underlying principles of what might be termed community theatre, a form of socially engaged arts practice that seeks to heal a perceived rift in the social bond by giving voice to the authentic experience of people with intellectual disabilities. There are problems with this model of practice, as Back to Back and others have realised. Firstly, it means that artists and theatre companies often end up as workers for, and mouthpieces of, the ‘progressive’ ideologies of certain national and local political institutions and initiatives. These in turn may determine what is creatively produced: for example, an imperative only to present ‘positive images’ of people with intellectual disabilities. Secondly, this model often proceeds from a basis of finding expression or narratives that are ‘authentic’ to the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities and thus is ultimately based on an ontology of an ‘authentic self’ (McHenry 2007: 53). This ontology emphasises individual experience and fails to account for the social construction of experience, promoting an idea of the self or subject that is all too easily commodified in a mediatised form such as theatre.

This model of theatre as a mere instrument of expression for the authenticity of the experience of marginalisation fails to take account of how mediatised forms in many ways determine and construct experience. It fails to take account of the fact that the limited – and limiting – experience of education and socialisation of people with intellectual disabilities makes it very difficult for them to express themselves within systems of meaning-making and symbolic exchange. These systems are by their very nature normalising and based on assumptions of a shared experience to which they have not had access. People with intellectual disabilities often find themselves therefore in a vicious circle of exclusion and marginalisation without the linguistic and expressive tools needed to respond to this exclusion – tools which in fact can in part contribute to their exclusion.

In terms of the mediatised form of theatre, this exclusion at a deep level raises the question of how somebody without training in the various disciplines and languages of theatre, and who may struggle to develop the physical and mental stamina needed for the demands of contemporary theatre's rehearsal and performance processes, is to be included? Back to Back Theatre Company have over a thirty-year period explored practically and conceptually how to include actors with intellectual disabilities and I now wish to show how their particular processes of development inform their work and provide a context for an analysis of Lady Eats Apple.

Back to Back Theatre: the development of the company and the development of actors with intellectual disabilities

The history of Back to Back should not be told merely as a teleology of success and progress in which ever greater artistic and commercial success interlinks with a narrative of the increasingly progressive and meaningful inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. Instead, the company's development can be viewed as an exploration of 'the distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2012) in the presentation and representation of people with intellectual disabilities. I will develop how I am adapting Rancière's terminology in an analysis of Lady Eats Apple, but in this immediate context I mean the terms on which the actors are made visible and audible as well as the means they have at their disposal to make themselves seen and heard.

At times the company's performances have achieved such critical praise that commentators want to judge the aesthetic and political efficacy of the work as going beyond intellectual disability, to a place of artistic integrity where disability becomes invisible. This is certainly a position that the ensemble has explored and may appear to have adopted. I do not believe, however, that the elimination of intellectual disability from perceptions of the company's work constitutes the company's ultimate aim. Back to Back inhabits a shifting standpoint as a company, a fluid sense of identity. Their work both transcends intellectual disability and at the same time is immanently grounded in it. This toing and froing between the power and affective charge of various manifestations of disability and ability that informs the company's choice of both narrative content and formal exploration is intimately tied to the decision to work with the same core of actors, actors with a variety of intellectual disabilities. A theatre company that seeks to address perceived issues of actors with developmental disabilities needs a real commitment to a substantial allocation of time to the processes of devising, creation and performance.
It also needs a flexible and dialectical conception of what constitutes development for these performers and for the company. In this fluid model that Back to Back has developed over twenty years or more, successive productions are often responses to previous works and provocations of future work.

I wish now to provide a context for the aesthetic and political concerns of Lady Eats Apple by examining some of the company’s previous work with the core ensemble of actors. Small metal objects is perhaps the performance by the company where intellectual disability is least visible. The production questioned what constitutes performance by its very staging: seating the audience in a marquee in highly visible locations: Circular Quay in Sydney, Flinders Street station in Melbourne. This arrangement cast the audience as an object of public spectatorship and intermingled the performance of the theatrical narrative with the surrounding ‘unconscious’ performances (Hadley 2014) of commuters, shoppers and passers-by all caught up in the hidden narratives of public space. In the spoken text of the theatrical narrative, reference to intellectual disability is sparse and oblique. Simon Laherty’s presence, or represented presence, is remarkable in the performance but this is due not merely to the visible ‘embodied difference’ (Kroß 2015: 183) that marks him as a person with intellectual disabilities but also to his stillness, contrasting to the ‘busyness’ of the urban environment around him. His deadpan delivery is engaging, his function in the plot is, as Hargrave has pointed out, as a kind of contemporary Bartleby (2015: 59) who, despite his isolation or exclusion, “would prefer not to” buy into systems of economic and sexual exchange. Some audience members and critics expressed confusion as to whether Simon Laherty’s ‘presence’ was due to his being a person with intellectual disabilities or an actor with intellectual disabilities. This is a significant confusion. If Simon Laherty is not acting, he is either a bad actor or achieving the highest form of Stanislavskian ‘naturalistic’ acting in which the audience is unaware that the actor is acting but believes that she is just being in performance. In fact, the high level of skill that Simon Laherty brings to this performance is a skill that has been facilitated and enhanced in the continuing working relationship with director Bruce Gladwin. Any audience confusion over whether he is acting or being himself may indicate not only a lack of familiarity with the previous work of Back to Back but also with the capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities.

In the development of their oeuvre, Back to Back has at times made use of this confusion over whether actors with intellectual disabilities are just ‘being’ or ‘acting’. In an interview with Richard Gough, Bruce Gladwin refers to ‘a series of comments in relation to Small metal objects which influenced the development of their next production, Food Court: Some people questioned the two-dimensional quality of actors with intellectual disabilities and suggested that they were always the victim. And it really got us thinking and led to the idea: ‘Well let’s make something where the people with disabilities are the perpetrators of an action, as opposed to having to respond to it.’ So that was a starting point, in terms of the idea of having the capacity to be evil (Grehan and Eckersall 2013a: 241).

Abuse and bullying is at the core of Food Court but what makes it perhaps unusual for a non-disabled audience is that the perpetrators of this verbal and physical violence are people with intellectual disabilities. Of course, this bullying and abuse is enacted or performed and not actual, but it is also cited by the performers. Nicki Holland and Rita Halaberec, young women with Down syndrome, take it in turns to heap insults on Sarah Mainwaring, a young woman with an acquired brain injury, but, as Theron Schmidt points out:

We do not know if the speaker is talking to the other woman or to a character who is represented by the woman, or repeating the things that she has been called (Schmidt 2013: 200).

Helena Grehan summarises this citation of the abuse to which many people with intellectual disabilities are subjected as ‘a group of performers performing the “majority” (in Grehan and Eckersall 2013a: 109). Schmidt characterises these utterances that seem to question agency, and in which the subject and object of the utterance seem to rebound onto the speaker, as ‘un-locatable speech-acts’ (Schmidt 2013: 207). This reflexivity of subject and object is likewise at play in ‘We will look after you’, the cited speech act that concludes Lady Eats Apple.

Bruce Gladwin gives an account of how responses to Food Court similarly acted as a provocation for the company’s next work Ganesh versus the Third Reich:

We had a conversation with one festival director in Australia when we presented Food Court. She had some concerns and she had spoken to someone else who had some concerns about the process of us making Food Court and the actors’ role within it and how empowered the actors were and questions about exploitation and manipulation. We also did this Q&A in Brussels at Kunsten festival and someone stood up and said ‘You know, I don’t believe these actors are capable of doing this work and I know these type of people and there’s no way they could make a work like this . . .’ (Grehan and Eckersall 2013a: 246).

This questioning of the agency of the performers with intellectual disabilities and the charge of exploitation
This director purports to understand and seeks to validate and empower these actors with intellectual disabilities and yet he clearly patronises them and ultimately commits an act of violence against one of them. During a section of the rehearsal narrative, the actors intensely debate the exploitation of actors with intellectual disabilities and the question of who has the right to tell whose stories. This discussion, however, reveals itself to be not a discussion of the exploitation of actors with intellectual disabilities but an interrogation of audience assumptions about actors with intellectual disabilities. The sequence suggests that concern over the 'ethics' of the involvement of actors with intellectual disabilities assumes that such actors have no agency in, nor any understanding of, what they are doing and yet this discussion has been devised, rehearsed and is enacted night after night in performance, in all its humour and nuanced complexity, by actors with intellectual disabilities.

The terms of the visibility of intellectual disability are further explored in Back to Back's subsequent production Super Discount, a typically impossible theatrical imagining of comic-book super-hero narratives which is intercut with humorous deconstructions of the nature of theatrical storytelling. At the climax of the super-hero strand of the narrative, Mark Deans, a performer with Down syndrome confronts the comic-book villain, played by David Woods, a non-disabled actor, on top of a table, and destroys him with a mighty roar of power in a highly theatrical snowstorm. This is a dramatic climax but by no means the end of the story. Stuck up on the table, Mark, the performer, needs to get down and requires the assistance of Sarah Mainwaring, an actress with an acquired brain injury, whose fragile movements are characterised by shaking. Grehan and Eckersall make the following observation about this sequence of actions:

As the other actors begin to strike the set around him, Mark, our superhero, can't get down from the table. He calls to another of the cast – Sarah Mainwaring – for help. The fragility of our existence is captured in these closing moments (Grehan and Eckersall 2013b).

This same pair of actors make equally significant exits from the space in the opening and closing sections of Lady Eats Apple to which I will now return.

Lady Eats Apple: the distribution of the sensible

In analysing Lady Eats Apple I make particular use of Rancière's concept of the 'distribution of the sensible', the parcelling out of what is sayable, visible and thinkable, a distribution that takes place at a level that is at once aesthetic, including the root meaning of aesthesis as applying to the senses, and political, including the meaning of what is held as common sense. Theatre, for Rancière, is a location that is both aesthetic and political, as it is:

... first and foremost the space of the visibility of speech, the space of problematic translations of what is said into what is seen (2009: 88).

If Lady Eats Apple renders 'we will look after you' something that is sayable by people with intellectual disabilities to those without, on what terms is this saying made visible? The words repeat and echo in the darkness as the lights go down, the generally recognised signal of the end of a performance. This is, however, a particular darkness: it is not merely the conventional state in which the final moments of a play await the customary applause of the audience. In this darkness sits an audience whose expectations of what it is that they are seeing and hearing, and of the basic elements of conventional dramatic narrative – of plot, what is happening, and what comes next, and of character, who they are hearing and seeing – have been repeatedly disoriented. It is, however, this disorientation that renders those present aware of the distribution of the sensible in what they are seeing, hearing, feeling and understanding.

This disorientation has operated progressively throughout the production in terms of the audience's sense of perception, both visual and spatial. They are of course at the theatre, but it is in some ways a post-theatrical space, a theatre haunted by the ghost of its own demise, the demise of Aristotelian, dramatic representation. The first section of the play, An Insecure God, takes place within what appears to be a black box arrangement of the space, a studio theatre. Actors sit from the front, from above, and from the side move on a platform of black rostra and behind them animated text and images are projected onto a form of cyclorama. At the end of this section the first major reconfiguration of the space takes place as the black inflatable that has encased actors and audience alike is deflated and pulled down to reveal a surrounding white inflatable that had been hidden by the black one. A shift takes place for the audience from spectatorship to a more contemplative observation: from the black box of the theatre to the white cube of the art.
The title is an ironic take on a myth of origins and there is irony too in the presentation of what provides the origin or starting point of *Lady Eats Apple*. It could be argued that the piece begins with the arrival in the auditorium of the audience who are then faced with performers pre-set on the stage, accompanied by the technicians, the ‘invisible’ labours of theatre. These real technicians look at their watches and start the show but it is a show that has perhaps already started. It could be argued that the piece begins when ushers, visible but generally discounted labourers of theatre, guide the audience through the entrance to the auditorium, which in the case of *Lady Eats Apple* involves each audience member squeezing through the membrane of the inflatable until they emerge into the womb of the seating area. It could of course be argued that the piece begins with the promotion of the show as part of the Melbourne Festival, or further as part of the ongoing oeuvre of Back to Back Theatre from whom an audience will expect the participation of actors with intellectual disabilities, formal experimentation or innovation, and a certain degree of audience discomfort or disorientation.

The first section of the narrative of the play is a kind of alienated or oblique presentation of the Garden of Eden myth. We have the naming of animals, we have a kind of mythos or plot, and the narrative arcs of specific characters. This is because *Lady Eats Apple* might be characterised as an example of what Hans-Thies Lehmann has characterised as ‘postdramatic theatre’ (2006), a type of performance that exposes the narrativity of dramatic narrative. This is no mere formal experimentation by Back to Back. The work of the company engages the strategies of post-dramatic theatre just as it incorporates the discourses of postmodern or even post-human critical disability studies and activist practices. What all of these discourses, practices and critiques have in common is that they render the notion of the individual self, and narratives that are underpinned by an ontology of the individual self, problematic. Back to Back’s theatre is political in its investigation of the construction of the self, in terms of Guattari’s ‘three ecologies’ (1989): the social, mental and environmental.

It is in this context that the narrative structure or rather the narrativity, of *Lady Eats Apple* should be considered. The title is a particularly offhand reference to that section of the Book of Genesis that deals with the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and it is this story that provides the basis for the first section of the piece. There is perhaps an oblique connection here between the narrative that gives an account of original sin and cultural narratives of blame and sin that still hover around the origins of a person’s intellectual disability.

In this analysis of the performance I have thus far deliberately foregrounded those elements of theatricality that are non-verbal and I have not included much reference to those more traditional elements of dramatic theatre familiar since Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1999): the *mythos* or plot, and the narrative arcs of specific characters. This is because *Lady Eats Apple* might be characterised as an example of what Hans-Thies Lehmann has characterised as ‘postdramatic theatre’ (2006), a type of performance that exposes the narrativity of dramatic narrative. This is no mere formal experimentation by Back to Back. The work of the company engages the strategies of post-dramatic theatre just as it incorporates the discourses of postmodern or even post-human critical disability studies and activist practices. What all of these discourses, practices and critiques have in common is that they render the notion of the individual self, and narratives that are underpinned by an ontology of the individual self, problematic. Back to Back’s theatre is political in its investigation of the construction of the self, in terms of Guattari’s ‘three ecologies’ (1989): the social, mental and environmental.

The first section of the narrative of the play is a kind of alienated or oblique presentation of the Garden of Eden myth. We have the naming of animals, we have a kind of God the Father figure, Scott Price, we have a kind of Adam, Mark Deans, and Eve, Sarah Mainwaring. The subject of intellectual disability is treated in a similarly oblique and offhand way. Interrupting the highly schematic Eden narrative, Scott Price, a performer with intellectual disabilities, engages in dialogue with Brian Lipson (reviewers are confused about whom he represents: ‘possibly Lucifer’ (Boyd) ‘perhaps Satan before the Fall’ (Woodhead) ‘the Son of God or perhaps Satan’ (Litson)), an actor without disabilities, about not wanting to be patronised because he has an intellectual disability. In this exchange Lipson is both very understanding and does not really engage with what Scott is saying, one reviewer describing this encounter as:

... the psychological experience of disability rubbing against well-meaning, and uncomprehending, condescension (Woodhead).

Adam, played by Mark Deans, is a performer with Down’s syndrome and Sarah Mainwaring playing Eve
is an actress with an acquired brain injury but just how much in fact is disability substantive in *Lady Eats Apple*? The company is known as an ensemble of performers with disabilities. Individual performers on stage are marked by the visual difference of disability but there are only oblique references to it in each of the sections that comprises the ‘triptych’ of *Lady Eats Apple* ‘a cosmic dance from the Garden of Eden to a medieval snowstorm to the urban jungle we live in’ (Melbourne Festival website).

In *An Insecure God*, Mark Deans and Sarah Mainwaring, whose leaving of the space was so significant in *Super Discount*, similarly unsteadily make their way off the stage rostra as Adam and Eve in the production’s minimalist and schematic representation of the expulsion of the first humans from the Garden of Eden. The pairing of these two actors recurs in the third section of the piece, *The Human Bond*, in which they play two members of a group of intellectually disabled theatre cleaners in industrial blue uniforms. They are supervised by a ‘self-important disability worker’ (Woodhead 2016), played by Romany Latham. When Mark Deans asks to be able to drive the group’s car she tells him he will never get a licence as he is ‘a forty-something year old man with Down syndrome.’ Behind her back, Mark Deans and Sarah Mainwaring embark upon the beginnings of intimacy, poignantly staged, as they make their way up the steps of the huge auditorium to their imagined exit from the theatre and into life outside the theatre. This intimate and fragile narrative is interrupted by the foregrounded action switching back to the stage platform on which Brian Lipson has been lying since the end of *An Insecure God* – and, presumably, throughout the mid-section of *Matter Creates Matter*. All of the performers eventually make their way down to him, expressing concern about his wellbeing. Some of them think he may have had a fit, and various pieces of advice are given and repeated as to how to treat somebody in this state. It is at the end of this sequence that various performers repeat the phrase ‘We will look after you’ as the lights begin to fade.

In many ways Brian Lipson has not only been playing dead or playing unconscious but, in a reversal typical of Back to Back, he is playing the role that people with disabilities so often play in guaranteeing the flow and integrity of narrative, as outlined in Mitchell and Snyder’s (2001) *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. His is the presence that is marginal yet indispensable for the development of the strange blend of the cosmic and the intimate that is the post-dramatic theatrical narrative of *Lady Eats Apple*. ‘We will look after you’ accurses a constellation of meanings: we will put you in the position that we have occupied for so long and see how you like it. We will look after you: the time has come for us actively to look, after being the looked at, the object of your scrutiny and gaze, the time has come for our perspective. What will come of this looking in the time after?

The Time After

In what present and/or future time might this reconfiguration of the ethical and political relationships between people with and without intellectual disabilities, ironic or not, take place? To adapt another phrase from the work of Rancière, drawing on his analysis of the films of the Hungarian film-maker Bela Tarr (2013), I suggest that these words and this type of theatre find their efficacy in the ‘time after’. To adapt Rancière’s formulations, this time is neither *utopian*, meaning that theatre involving actors with intellectual disabilities is expected to bring about a messianic full and equal inclusion and validation of people with intellectual disabilities, nor is it *catastrophic*, meaning that such theatre could only ever hope to offer sad parody and bitter irony memorialising a history of exclusion and melancholy in the face of a hoped for inclusion that will never come. The ‘time after’, as Rancière characterises it, is a time in which we take interest in the ‘material events’ against which hope and despair may be measured:

> It is the time after all stories, the time when one takes direct interest in the sensible stuff in which these stories cleaved their shortcuts between projected and accomplished ends (2013: 63).

Theatrical narratives are not only experienced in embodied and sensory ways, they are also experienced as a collaboration between performers and audience both at the time of the event and in the time after the event. This potential longer term effect of theatre is eloquently expressed by Althusser in what Rancière termed ‘his most inspired text’ (2009: 37) ‘The “Piccolo Teatro”: Bertolazzi and Brecht-Notes on a Materialist Theater’ when he writes of the delayed effect on him of viewing a particular play on a specific occasion:

> I look back, and I am suddenly and irresistibly assailed by the question: are not these few pages in their maladroit and groping way, simply that unfamiliar play *El Nost Milan*, performed on a June evening, pursuing me in its incomplete meaning, searching in me, despite myself, now that all the actors and sets have been cleared away, for the *advent* of its silent discourse? (Althusser 1997: 213).

*Lady Eats Apple* is likely to provoke a similar response in those who attend it. This is in part because the involvement of actors with intellectual disabilities as devisers and performers is a project for a theatre of a world that is yet to arrive: a world in which such people might be meaningfully included. A silent discourse of questions arises as to how viewing people with intellectual disabilities as actors, in the sense of agents and creators, might affect the position of people with intellectual disabilities outside the theatre? This is a question with no answer to be found immediately after...
the performance: it remains a challenge that needs to be pursued in the silence of thought and in a practical consideration of the sensible stuff and material events of lived experience.

There is a reflexivity of subject and object in ‘We will look after you’ – the speech act that concludes Lady Eats Apple. There is, furthermore, a deliberate indeterminacy or ambiguity of reference in the ‘we’ and ‘you’ of this cited performative utterance. This indeterminacy is striving to express something more than a mere reversal of the power relations of dependence and care. Beyond ‘we will look after you’ or its transposition into ‘you will look after us’ is the potential for a relationship in which the looking after is a mutuality, or in Jasbir Puar’s term a ‘conviviality’ (Puar 2009: 168). In the advent of the silent discourse, the binary of ‘we’ and ‘you’, as it intersects with the binary of lived experience.

There is a reflexivity of subject and object in ‘We will look after you’ – the speech act that concludes Lady Eats Apple. There is, furthermore, a deliberate indeterminacy or ambiguity of reference in the ‘we’ and ‘you’ of this cited performative utterance. This indeterminacy is striving to express something more than a mere reversal of the power relations of dependence and care. Beyond ‘we will look after you’ or its transposition into ‘you will look after us’ is the potential for a relationship in which the looking after is a mutuality, or in Jasbir Puar’s term a ‘conviviality’ (Puar 2009: 168). In the advent of the silent discourse, the binary of ‘we’ and ‘you’, as it intersects with the binary of ability and disability, might be reconfigured. In the ‘time after’ is the promise of living together interdependently.

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Tony McCaffrey has many years’ experience as an actor, director, dramaturg and playwright in the United Kingdom, France, Turkey and the United States. He has a BA in English from King’s College, Cambridge and a PhD in Theatre and Film Studies from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand: ‘Incapacity and Theatricality: Politics and Aesthetics in Theatre Involving Actors with Intellectual Disabilities’. He is a Lecturer in Creative Industries at the National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art at Ara Institute of Canterbury and since 2004 has been Artistic Director of Different Light Theatre Company, an ensemble of people perceived to have intellectual disabilities. He has given papers at the conferences of Performance Studies International (2007-17) and the International Federation for Theatre Research (2012-17), at Theatre Performance Philosophy, Sorbonne, 2014 and at Corps en Scène at Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2015. A book based on his thesis is due for publication with Routledge in the series Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies in 2018-9. Performances devised by Different Light Theatre include The Poor Dears at Arts Activated Conference, the Powerhouse, Sydney 2010, Still Lives in San Jose, California and the Ludus Festival, Leeds 2011, The Earthquake in Chile, 2011, a site specific performance in collaboration with Richard Gough of the Centre for Performance Research and Free Theatre, The Lonely and the Lovely at Arts Activated Conference, the Concourse, Sydney 2012, The Canterbury Tales, 2013, a site specific performance in earthquake-damaged central Christchurch and Three Ecologies of Different Light at Performance Studies international 22, University of Melbourne, 2016. The company has recently presented a new work, I belong in the past and the future and the very now at the ADSA Conference at Auckland University of Technology in June 2017.

End Notes

1. I should at this point declare my own complicity in such activity: thirteen years of working as director of Different Light Theatre Company, an ensemble of people with intellectual disabilities based in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Night Blindness

I read that rabbits are born blind and blind mole rats have no eyes, and Helen Keller was deafblind. My father was blind in one eye and his mother was going blind from glaucoma. I didn’t know then there were other kinds of blindness, like colour or snow or night.

I used to pretend I was blind. I would close my eyes and try to recognise objects by touch alone, and attempt to navigate my environment without bumping into things. I thought I was preparing myself, but perhaps, like a toddler playing hide-and-seek, I believed I couldn’t be seen.

My mother says she didn’t know. That when my father came home drunk late at night and didn’t come to bed, she assumed he had fallen asleep downstairs. In hindsight I could say she had night blindness, but then maybe I would have to admit that I had it too.

Muted

Five people stand in the room, including the child on the flat screen and the bars into which she is pressed. They have muted the sound, but can still hear the pleading in her eyes, the pull of her appeal, an outpouring of silence that quite interrupts their meal.

Alys Jackson, Coromandel Valley, SA

Laura Kenny, Brisbane, Queensland
We Have to Talk About Diane Arbus: An art-as-research perspective of visual arts representations of intellectual disability

DONNA MCDONALD

The way we understand and define ourselves is often mediated by the way other people express their perceptions of us either as individuals or as representatives of a social group, in a range of genres including literature, film, the visual arts, photography and graffiti. In this article, I examine the identity implications and socio-cultural impacts of the persistent visual absence or narrative misrepresentation of people with disability. My discussion centres on the works of American photographer Diane Arbus and her 1968-1971 series of duotone photographs of institutionalised intellectually disabled people. Diane Arbus was a photographer in thrall with her own art, rather than an artist who sought to better understand the people she photographed. Nevertheless, visual art works offer viewers fresh ways of understanding disability and the experiences of disabled people both historically and currently. My art-as-research drawing project is a memorial of sorts for those people with a disability who have been oppressed, marginalised, excluded and mocked. My revised images provide a new narrative for Arbus’s photographic subjects, and evoke fresh ways of regarding historic images of people with intellectual disability.

‘Othering’ Disability in Literature and the Visual Arts

The way we understand ourselves and define our personal hopes and dreams is often mediated by the way other people express their perceptions of us either as individuals or as representatives of a social group, in a range of genres including literature, film, the visual arts, photography and graffiti. But what if we find our lives are either persistently absent from the visual frame or persistently misrepresented in literature to the extent that we do not recognise ourselves, do not know ourselves? More specifically, what are the identity and socio-cultural impacts of this invisibility or misrepresentation on us, individually and collectively, if we have a disability?

I explored some of these questions in my 2011 doctoral thesis, ‘Hearsay: how stories of deaf people and deafness are told’ (See also McDonald 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014) and found that people who are deaf have historically been used in narratives as metaphors or leitmotifs for loneliness, alienation, shame, evil and other exclusionary qualities. The reasons for, and the impacts of, this distortion still puzzle me in many ways. However, it has become clear that we each have the right to reclaim our lives by expressing our individual stories, either orally, textually or visually. Equally, we have the right to challenge the way others purport to describe our lives and experiences. More than this, we have the responsibility to redress, where possible, the impact of historic misrepresentations when we encounter them.

This is why I have come to talk and write about American photographer Diane Arbus and her 1968-1971 series of duotone photographs of intellectually disabled people. These men and women were institutionalised residents of the American Institute for Mental Studies (or the AIMS, since renamed the Vineland Development Centre) in New Jersey in the United States. The series of photos were later reproduced in a monograph, ‘Untitled’, by her daughter, Doon Arbus (Arbus and Cuoma 2011). In my art-as-research project, I revisited three of these photos, with the aim of restoring the individual dignity and humanity of the people captured in the frame of the unblinking photographer’s gaze.

A Confrontation

In September 2014, during a Sunday visit to the Queensland Art Gallery by the wending Brisbane River, I browsed through one of its bookshops. I enjoyed the contemplation of sifting my way through the beautifully produced art catalogues, books and miscellany such as scarves, calendars and journals for the aspiring artist. I fell into a meditative reverie. I was in this pool of calm when I chanced upon an oversized hardcover book wrapped in a sepia-grey cover. Centred on the front cover was a grey and cream coloured photograph of four women and a man standing on a pavement adjacent to a park. The women were...
dressed in white, crumpled, ill-fitting attire; one wore a discarded floor-length ball-gown and the others wore what appeared to be knee-length hospital nightgowns. The man was dressed in dark long trousers which crinkled around his ankles, a long-sleeved shirt with white buttons and a bowler hat. All five wore eye-masks. Above them, the bough of a leafy tree loomed heavily, even threateningly. In the distance, the blur of a stand of trees can be seen. The sky is ominous with clouds; the long shadows on the footpath indicate that this photo was taken either early in the morning or late in the afternoon. At the top was a single word in white typeface, Untitled. Beneath the photo was the inscription, Diane Arbus.

I gazed at the cover photo for several moments, trying to make sense of what I was looking at. I could not understand the image. Who were these people? Why were they wearing masks? And what was it about the photo that was making me feel uncomfortable? I opened the book to see what lay inside and found a grotesquerie.

On page after page – fifty pages, in fact – I saw a single, square-shaped duotone photo of a person or several people who evidently had cognitive or intellectual disabilities. Apart from the photo on the frontispiece facing the title page, the pages to the left of all the photos are blank, thus heightening the sense of otherness, alienation and noirish quality of drama which imbues all the photos. None of the photos are titled. None of the people in the photos are named. Viewed together, the photos are a chilling triumph of collective anonymity over individual humanity.

The details of this anonymity are compelling. Boys and men feature only rarely (See Arbus 2011: Photos 21, 32 and 47). Across the span of those fifty photos, most of the girls and women who gaze out towards the viewer look dazed. ‘Poignantly, the images [also] frame the viewer in the act of staring’ (Millett-Gallant 2012: 115). Indeed, Millett-Gallant notes that ‘Arbus’s work traffics in the dynamics of the gaze/stare’.

Many of the people in the photos are masked; their masks vary from simple eye-masks to garish Halloween-style masks, obliterating not only their identity and history, but also their unique personhood. Several are freakishly costumed, wrapped either in oversized blankets, coats or sheets (See Arbus 2011: Photos 7, 17, 26, 39, 44) or in too small, too tight fairy-dresses (See Arbus 2011: Photo 25). One woman is dressed in patchwork garments to resemble a scarecrow, with straw in her hair (See Arbus 2011: Photo 46). Some women are stripped down to their underwear (See Arbus 2011: Photo 5) or swimming costumes (See Arbus 2011: Photos 31, 48); they look vulnerable. A few of the other women have lipstick smeared crudely across their mouths, with little regard for finesse, style or beauty (See Arbus 2011: Photos 30, 41, 44). Indeed, one woman’s lipstick has been applied with a gesture towards a clown’s smile and she has been posed with a dunce’s hat on her head (See Arbus 2011: Photo 43). The irony signals a casual cruelty towards the woman. Hardly any of the girls or women are smiling.

The rare visible expression of joy – e.g. three young women playing in a park (See Arbus 2011: Photo 4) and two women wearing Easter Parade bonnets as they stand arm in arm (See Arbus 2011: Photo 41) – attenuate the somberness of the other photos. Similarly, there are only rare examples of casual poses: two women wearing summer frocks hold hands as they smile shyly towards the viewer (See Arbus 2011: Photo 37) and another woman is dressed neatly in a spotted top, knee-length shorts and sneakers as she smiles a bashful smile, gripping her own hands (See Arbus 2011: Photo 38). These more informal photos attenuate the grotesqueness of the contrived postures – wilfully ugly masks and ill-fitting costumes draped on so many of the other men and women (See Arbus 2011: Photos 10, 16, 17, 20, 27, 34, 35, 42).

But perhaps the most heart-breaking photos are those that reveal with unadorned simplicity the raw vulnerability, sorrow, confusion and bewilderment of those men and women with intellectual disability who were shut away from the world between 1968-71 (See Arbus 2011: Photos 3, 6, 9, 12, 14, 21,30). In all these fifty pages of photos, I not only saw the work of an artist in command of, and in thrall to, the aesthetics of her photographic craft. I also saw the alienating distance between the photographer and her subjects. Diane Arbus had transformed these men and women, made vulnerable by their intellectual disabilities and hidden from the public in their segregated residences, into freakish objects for the voyeuristic gaze.

I put the book back on the shelf in the Art Gallery bookshop. At first, I felt merely shaken. And then, I felt angry with Diane Arbus and sad for the defencelessness of those long-ago secluded men and women with an intellectual disability. For several days immediately following my visit to the Queensland Art Gallery, and then on and off in the ensuing months, I flashed back to those disturbing, confronting portrayals.

Arbus’s Focus on ‘The Flaw’

I turn now to provide some context to Diane Arbus’s ‘Untitled’ photos. I am mindful that we unconsciously bring our own contemporary cultural histories to our viewing responses, without realising how our personal experiences influence our appraisal and interpretation of art works of other cultures and from earlier times (Panofsky 1955). I could not help comparing Arbus’s photos with the benignly sentimental publicity photos that had been taken in my childhood days when I attended the Yeerongpilly Oral Deaf Pre-School and the Gladstone...
Road Deaf School in Brisbane. I imagined the co-mingled hurt and anger that I would feel today if Diane Arbus had dared to take such cruelly dehumanising photographs of my classmates and me.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assert that Diane Arbus’s photographs in ‘Untitled’ are disturbing, confronting, and transgressive. Arbus had prior form in producing transgressive works:

‘What you notice about people’, Diane Arbus said, ‘is the flaw’. Arbus turned flaws into great photographs. During the 1950s and ’60s, she pointed her camera straight across polite social boundaries, at dwarves, nudists, disturbed children, the ugly, the afflicted, the uncertain, the caught-off-guard (Higonett 2016: np).

In 1961, Esquire magazine rejected a photo-essay by Arbus because of concerns ‘about publishing pictures of people for the sole purpose of showing them as eccentrics’ (Schultz 2011: 18). Arbus’s transgressive photography was influenced by her affiliation with a group of photographers, including Gary Winogrand, Lee Friedlander and Robert Frank, who rejected the humanist-realist photography of the 1950s, as exemplified by the seminal The Family of Man Exhibition in New York in 1955 (Hevey 1997). These photographers introduced ‘reportage portraiture showing the human race as an alienated species bewildered by its existence’ (Hevey 1997: 509). David Hevey notes that the ‘appalling’ outcome is that their surrealistic realism ‘anchored the new forms of a fragmented universe (to a greater or lesser extent) in new, even more oppressive images of disabled people’ (Hevey 1997: 509).

More than this, Arbus’s photos are entirely absent of the social-cultural and political contexts of her times. Millett-Gallant (2012: 116) claims that ‘Arbus’s photographs add to the history of disabled bodies on display’ but such a claim is contestable. After all, Arbus took the ‘Untitled’ photos well after the rise of the disability rights movement in the US and UK, and yet she anachronistically constructed her photos so that they were redolent of the freakery movement from a much earlier time. Why would she do that?

Part of the answer lies in Arbus’s fascination with ‘freaks’ and their history:

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in America, the public exhibition of people with real and alleged physical anomalies in museum, circus, carnival, world fair, and amusement park sideshows for amusement and profit was widely popular and for the most part respectable ... the people on exhibit sold photographs of themselves to patrons to supplement their income and to advertise their appearances (Bogdan et al. 2012: 7).

At that time, the ‘freak’ was portrayed either as ‘an upstanding person with conventional or highly regarded social status’ (Bogdan 2012: 11) or as an ‘exotic person’ with an emphasis on their ‘strange features and their alleged alien backgrounds’ (Bogdan et al. 2012: 15). Their disability was shown as the source of their greatness. ‘Pity was not part of freak photography … [and they were not] presented as needy, weak or destitute’ (Bogdan et al. 2012: 20-21). Significantly, these early ‘freaks’ had some control over their image. It is interesting to note that some contemporary disability performance activists such as Australian circus performer, Sarah Houbolt, are seeking to reclaim the term ‘natural born freak’ with pride, as a way of asserting some control over their identity-making.

In contrast, the intellectually disabled people in Diane Arbus’s photos had no control over their images. Indeed, Arbus ‘spoke of “pursuing them”, which implies an aggressive hunt for the right image’ (Bosworth 1984: 246, cited in Bogdan et al. 2012: 134). She was certainly active in seeking access to photograph people residing at institutions, and in 1968 she wrote to a friend, ‘I would like to photograph mentally retarded people, idiots, imbeciles and morons (morons are the smartest of the three) especially the cheerful ones’ (Arbus 2003: 196).

Her flippant tone here is unsettling to say the least. Between 1968 and 1971, Arbus wrote several letters and kept detailed diary notes about this photography project. Facsimiles of, and excerpts from, some of her writing are reproduced in Revelations (See Arbus 2003: 64, 66, 196, 198, 202-5, 212-15, 223). Her persistent refrain is that of a photographer entirely focused on her struggle with photographic aesthetics, techniques and technicalities. She provides little evidence of attempting to get to know or understand the people she is photographing; her writing evinces no interest in the individual circumstances of these institutionalised people. Her descriptions of the people she meets are reductionist and cartoonish: ‘They are the strangest combination of grownup and child’; ‘Phyllis is the one with glasses and large eyes. Solemn intelligent mongoloid’; ‘I think Johanna is the one with the cowboy hat’ (Arbus 2003: 202-204). However, she did notice that ‘Some of them are perturbed and miserable. One of them says over and over again, “Was I the only one born?” ’ (Arbus 2003: 202).

Arbus ‘exulted over the photographs she made at Halloween of the residents of the Vineland facility in masks and costumes’ (Lubow 2016: 484-485). She wrote to her husband, Alan Arbus, ‘FINALLY what I’ve been searching for … I have discovered … late afternoon early winter sunlight … JUST like snapshots
only better’ (Arbus 2003: 66). Sociologist and disability studies scholar, Robert Bogdan et al. (2012: 135) abhors Arbus’s photographs and writes with concern on behalf of her subjects, ‘None of them is dressed in clothes that would be considered appropriate for the situations’. In bleak contrast, journalist Arthur Lubow (2016: 485) overlooks the physical reality of these people, instead noting Arbus’s attention to the ‘weak, watery light that arrives in late afternoon at the end of autumn ...’ and further claims, ‘Illuminated in this filtered sunshine, figures and landscapes evoke the gradated tonal range of an aquatint etching’. Lubow continues,

Many of these photographs recall particularly the aquatints of Goya’s Disparates ... Women with beaky noses, imbecilic grins and disguising masks appear in both artists’ visions ... [Arbus] too was creating tableaux that seem to emerge from dreams or nightmares ... her photograph of a procession of women dressed for Halloween, holding hands and looking in various directions, strikingly resembles Bruegel’s depiction of the blind leading the blind (485).

In short, Lubow unwittingly calls out the grotesqueness of Arbus’s photos. Like Arbus, and perhaps in thrall to Arbus’s fame, he appears to be focused only on the end-product i.e. the photograph, and thus reveals an unreflective approach to the inherent lack of humanity in her photos. Or as Bogdan et al. (2012: 135) so astigently noted, ‘Their world was always the world of the freaks, and hers was always the world of art’.

**Ethics in Creative Practices**

Some people might argue that the role of the creative practitioner – writer, artist, musician, performer – is to challenge and contest norms. That is right; I agree. But a key ethics question is ‘how do we interact with each other?’ As Higonett (2016: np) observes,

In the liberal democracies of the early 21st century, we aspire to assuage everyone’s sensibilities and treat no one as an “other”. I am reminded of a three-step speech protocol written on the windows of a Los Angeles private school: “Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?”

Higonett (2016: np) applies this protocol to the Arbus photos and decides, ‘Arbus’s photographs may be true, but they are not kind, and only necessary to the extent that we believe unkind art is necessary’. Higonett (2016: np) continues, ‘Though she lived her personal life without boundaries, her own work perpetuated social boundaries ... with something verging on contempt, certainly a conviction about difference’.

It is refreshing to read Higonett’s critical comments addressing the simple, humanist issue of people’s feelings. Scholarly criticism taking into account the individual humanity of the intellectually disabled people institutionalised in a residential facility is rare. Instead, writers such as Patricia Bosworth (Diane Arbus, A Biography) and Susan Sontag (On Photography) ignore Arbus’s ‘oppressive representations of disabled people’ (Hevey 1997: 510). They either extol the aesthetics of the photographs; unquestioningly accept Arbus’s presentation of her subjects as ‘people who are pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive’ (Hevey 1997 citing Sontag: 510); or collude with Arbus by writing patronisingly about her ‘gentle and patient way with “them” ’ (Hevey 1997 citing Bosworth: 510). Sontag wonders, ‘Do they see themselves ... like that?’ (Hevey 1997 citing Sontag: 510). As Hevey (1997: 510) points out, Neither of these critics ... considered asking the observed what they felt about the images in which they figured. ... the entire discourse has absented the voice of those at its centre – disabled people.

Even the accomplished disability-in-art historian and disability studies scholar, Ann Millett-Gallant (2012: 117) invites us to regard the ‘disabled subjects as performative agents’, thus implying the disabled residents in Arbus’s works were acting with fully informed, purposive volition. In doing so, Millett-Gallant sidelines the reality that the residents were institutionalised at a time when they would have had little to zero agency in making choices about even benign daily events such as meal-times, sleep schedules, selection of clothes and social activities. How then, would these residents have had the skills to freely, knowingly, and purposively agree to participate in Arbus’s sophisticated photographic project?

Moreover, Arbus’s photos raise ethical dilemmas about the consequences of her access to those intellectually disabled people, beyond the immediate act of taking their photos. Even if the intellectually disabled participants consented to have their photos taken, how could they have understood or imagined the likely consequences across time and space (e.g. through the global reach of the internet)? In any case, having taken those photos, Arbus lost control over their distribution both in her own time and into the future. Indeed, in 1971 she reportedly confided her regrets in taking the photos and did not want them to be published (Lubow 2016). She certainly could not have foreseen how all those women and girls, men and boys in her photos would feel in the years to come; nor how their families would feel.

Their history and our present day historical perspective matter because looking back on our history (or various histories) helps us to understand why things are as they are today. Reflecting on history can also help us to see how things could be better or different today. Thus, just as the name of the institution changed from American Institute for Mental Studies to Vineland, so have social
values changed. But those people are forever trapped in the Arbus photos, like insects fossilised in amber.

‘Talking Back to Diane Arbus’: My mixed-media response

While I was exploring the potency of visual arts narratives of disability in general and mulling over my distress about Diane Arbus's photos in particular, I enrolled in a drawing course with the idea of sketching my own responses to and about disability. I was inspired by the oft-cited mantra that ‘drawing is research’. With the encouragement of my ebullient art tutor, I produced a series of six mixed-media images, titled ‘Talking back to Diane Arbus’, in which I expressed my dismay about the way Diane Arbus portrayed – and perhaps even betrayed – the intellectually disabled people in her photos.

In my drawing-as-research project, I aimed to challenge the photographic ethics of Arbus’s photos, and restore the individual dignity and humanity of those long-ago secluded men and women by ‘revising’ Arbus’s images. I wanted to inject Arbus’s historic perspectives of people with intellectual disability with contemporary relevance. This was to be achieved by an act of memorialising them within the contemporary context of my work, i.e. working with and for people with disability.

With these aims in mind, I used a black pen to trace images of three Diane Arbus photos onto fragments of transparent paper: a masked woman in a wheelchair (Arbus 2011: Photo 10); two sad-faced girls in a park (Arbus 2011: Photo 3); and three girls, one of whom appears to be attempting a handstand, playing in a park (Arbus 2011: Photo 4). I glued these fragments onto crayoned photos of scenes from my workplace: a colleague typing, a seat bench, and my office bookshelves with a floral cup. To accompany these images, I made photocopies – heightened with excess red toner ink – of Arbus’s original duotone photographs, tore their edges, and rubbed them with charcoal and chalk to create an aged effect. Along the edges of each image, I wrote excerpts from an Alden Nowlan poem, ‘He sits down on the floor of a school for the retarded’, a poem infused with Nowlan’s affectionate regard for the intellectually disabled people he meets. His poem begins:

I sit down on the floor of a school for the retarded,
As a writer of magazine articles accompanying a band
that was met at the door by a child in a man’s body
who asked them, ‘Are you the surprise they promised us?’

Nowlan goes on to recount his experiences with the people he meets that day. One of them is a young woman who
sits down beside me and, as if it were the most natural
thing in the world, rests her head upon my shoulder.
He admits his discomfort with this gesture, doesn’t know what to do, until
‘Hold me,’ she whispers. ‘Hold me.’
I put my arm round her. ‘Hold me tighter.’
I do, and she snuggles closer ...

Nowlan remains anxious; he imagines that he will be remembered as a ‘sex-crazed writer’ who ‘publicly fondled the poor retarded girl.' Then he thinks about children, old people, and soldiers at war and realises

It's what we all want in the end,
to be held, merely to be held ...

In the poem's final stanza, Nowlan movingly invokes the universality of our individual need to be loved and to be held:

She hugs me now, this retarded woman, and I hug her.
We are brother and sister, father and daughter,
mother and son, husband and wife.
We are lovers. We are two human beings
huddled together for a little while by the fire
in the Ice Age, two hundred thousand years ago.

In this deeply reflective poem, Nowlan draws the reader into the lives of people with an intellectual disability, and invites the reader – you and me – to not only reflect upon, but also to recognise, our shared humanity across all boundaries of time and circumstances. Nowlan’s humanistic empathy is in sharp contrast to Arbus’s chilly detachment and deliberate ‘othering’ of her photographic subjects. (refer images gallery on pages 63-66).

Conclusion

When I look at Diane Arbus's photos, I see a photographer in thrall with her own art, rather than an artist who sought to better understand the people she photographed. At the same time, I believe that visual art works offer viewers fresh ways of understanding disability and the experiences of disabled people both historically and now. This is why I undertook this art-as-research drawing project as a memorial of sorts for those people with a disability who have been oppressed, marginalised, excluded and mocked. I hope that my revised images provide a new narrative for Arbus’s photographic subjects, and evoke fresh ways of regarding historic images of people with intellectual disability.
References

Author
Dr Donna McDonald is a creative arts researcher and practitioner, currently studying arts psychotherapy. She has research affiliations with the Creative Lab at QUT where, in 2017, she is contributing to a national research project about the accessibility of Australia’s performing arts venues. Donna is also an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at Griffith University where she convened and taught Disability Studies in the School of Human Services and Social Work from 2011 to 2015. In 2015-2016, Donna led an industry-Griffith University NDIS readiness research partnership to gain an improved understanding of people’s lived experiences of disability services delivery and decision-making pathways.

Donna’s publications include two books – Jack’s Story (Allen & Unwin 1991) and The Art of Being Deaf: a memoir (GUP 2014), several book chapters, peer reviewed journal articles, research reports and essays. She has also co-edited two journals; exhibited research-based art works in two art shows; published several commentaries in various media outlets including ‘The Conversation’; and written over 14 commissioned policy submissions and reports. Her book chapter, ‘Visual Narratives: Contemplating the Storied Images of Disability and Disablement’, is currently in press.

Donna’s disability research priorities include exploring the intersections between the creative arts and disability, including the implications of the NDIS for the arts sector in Australia. In her creative arts research and practice, Donna considers the works of other visual artists to find new ways of re-presenting and understanding the history and experiences of people with disability. In 2016, Donna exhibited a suite of her mixed-media drawing works, ‘Talking back to Diane Arbus’, at the Logan West Library’s Artists’ Walk and WAG Upstairs Gallery in Brisbane.

Footling
I was born feet first, a footling breech.
My mother says they tried to turn me by pressing her tummy, but I refused to stay where they put me. My father lifted the foot of the bed with bricks, and blood pooled in their heads while they slept.

I was born three weeks early, at 10:53 on a Wednesday morning. My father was drunk the first time he saw me.

a foundling on the other side of the window.

When I was one month old, my mother preserved my tiny feet in black ink.

According to folklore, a footling has the power to heal others by walking on them. I used to walk on my father’s back and listen for the crack of vertebrae popping like corn. For those fleeting moments, I may have felt foolish, but not trivial.

Laura Kenny, Brisbane, Queensland
Television as Social Welfare: 
*The Dreamhouse*

**KATIE ELLIS**

The 2014 ABC television series *The Dreamhouse* highlights a complex social problem in Australian society – housing support for young adults with an intellectual disability. This article analyses the representation of intellectual disability in the media using this television series and associated social media discussion. Media representations of disability do not exist independently of the social environment in which they are produced – they are also influenced by the political environment, representations that have preceded them, and the worldviews of the producers and the audience. Further, *The Dreamhouse* can be located within a trend of reality television seemingly offering social services in a post-welfare society (see Oullette and Hay 2008). The Dreamhouse is a particularly important instance of disability representation on Australian television because it was produced during a period of significant social change for Australia’s disabled population and prompted both criticism and praise even before the first episode aired.

**Introduction**

*The Dreamhouse* is a six-part documentary series about three young adults with intellectual disabilities moving out of home for the first time which was screened on ABC television in 2014. The series borrows from the reality television format and can be situated within a cycle of reality-influenced programming featuring people with intellectual disabilities (Biressi 2017). Its production company, Artemis International, promotes *The Dreamhouse* as a ‘refreshing’ series in which the young adults, Sarah, Justin and Kirk:

... fly the nest and move into a new home for 10 weeks. Experiencing life away from parents and learning to live more independently is a dream for all of them. And if it works out, they can stay on and call The Dreamhouse home (Artemis International 2014).

Living independently in a house of their own is a dream because typically for Australians with intellectual disability, the only way to receive the support they require is to stay living in the family home well into adulthood (McAlpine 2014a). The premise of *The Dreamhouse* program is to set up a home, identify some young adults with intellectual disability interested in moving out of their family home, and then find a way to make the model sustainable in the long term. Artemis International’s description of the housemates sets the tone of the series:

Justin and Sarah have Down syndrome. While Justin is confident and cocky and keen to assert his role as house alpha male, Sarah is a practising Christian and more docile and conservative. Kirk, the youngest, is very loud and energetic and hopes to make new friends but his autism means that social relationships can be challenging (Artemis International 2014).

In addition to the three housemates, the ‘cast’ of *The Dreamhouse* program includes support from a number of volunteer buddies who assist the housemates to learn to cook, clean, participate in the workforce and plan their social lives – they are also there to discuss housemates’ progress. The program is narrated by comedian Adam Hills, an Australian celebrity with a disability, and relies on documentary features such as his so-called ‘voice of God’ or ‘Big Brother’ narration. The program also features direct address to the camera – as characters speak to camera viewers are subject to a directive narrative telling us exactly what to think and feel. In addition, disability expert Geoff Pollock oversees the production, giving advice and guidance to the housemates and to the production crew, and also offering additional narrative via direct address to the audience.

The series has been both applauded for representing a significantly underrepresented group on television and criticised for offering an inaccurate representation of the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. For example, Tait’s quote below does both of these things (Tait 2014) by simultaneously showcasing the lives of three people with an intellectual disability and invoking problematic television stereotypes of gender, age and disability. Using *The Dreamhouse* series as a continuous thread, this
article will consider issues pertinent both to the program and to the wider context of the portrayal of disability in the media. This includes a common television representation of disability, the emergence of reality television as a form of social welfare opportunity, and the media’s critique of the program, both positive and negative. Borrowing from Palmer’s (2003) definition of reality programming as belonging to a ‘field of documentary practice’, throughout the paper The Dreamhouse is referred to as both a documentary series and as reality television.

The Dreamhouse was selected for analysis as part of a three-year project into representations of disability on Australian television. During the period of research, The Dreamhouse was one of the few identified representations focusing on Australians with intellectual disability. It also received considerable media attention and online discussion regarding this portrayal both in Australia and internationally. This article explores some of the reactions to the representation of intellectual disability in The Dreamhouse with specific reference to the role of reality television in a post-welfare society. The article notes the mixed response to the series, drawing on social media discourse available via the mainstream media and the Down Syndrome Australia news site. While the article profiles these important discussions, and notes a number of ironies, it is outside the scope of this short paper to explore the effectiveness of these social media campaigns to change audience attitudes and behaviours.

Common Television Representation of Disability

Television relies on stereotypes to quickly communicate information to an audience. This is especially pervasive when it comes to minority groups who have traditionally been used as a narrative shorthand to quickly and visually convey a character’s role (Ellis 2008; Mitchell and Snyder 2000). For example, Mitchell and Snyder describe the narrative function of disability as a device on which narratives are propped up (Mitchell and Snyder 2000). This view is supported by Richardson (2010) whose research suggests that people with intellectual disability are typically depicted as childlike, sexually inappropriate and unable to contribute to the community. Their narrative function is often to be laughed at or to depict the kindness of other characters who spend time with them (Richardson 2010). This is a common theme – as the introduction for this special issue explains, characters with intellectual disability are usually either peripheral to the story or overly relied on for narrative structure. In Television Entertainment, media studies scholar Jonathan Gray describes this type of reality programming as ‘normalization in action’ (Gray 2008). Normalisation in action refers to the way television is complicit in marginalising groups that do not ascribe to the ‘masculine heterosexual, and/or Western male perspective’ (Gray 2008). When The Dreamhouse aired on Australian television it therefore carried with it the weight of a desire for changed representations of intellectual disability on television by people with intellectual disability and their allies (McQueen 2014).

However, representation goes beyond just the program’s intentions – how it is perceived by its audience is also of great significance. Gray further notes ‘the weight of representation lies not only in any given television program, but also in the use and discussion of that program’ (Gray 2008). Whereas discussion of intellectual disability has historically taken place ‘in medical journals, published biography/memoir, and disability research’, as a result of television depictions like The Dreamhouse, such conversations are also now part of traditional and online media discourse. It should also be noted that these media representations of disability do not exist independently of the social environment in which they are produced – they are influenced by a number of factors including the political environment, representations that have preceded them, and the worldviews of the producers and the audience (Ellis 2008; Longmore 1987). So while it can be argued that stereotypes have tended to dominate traditional television representations (Campbell and Hoem 2001), it should also be considered that television is a progressive medium, and long-held ideologies – both in media circles and in the world outside of television – do change across time (Ellis 2015). As discussed throughout this paper, the representation of disability in The Dreamhouse is heavily influenced by the neoliberal social context in which it was produced. While moves for greater social inclusion were apparent in Australian society through the NDS and NDIS of the early 2010s, funding cuts introduced in that same decade are indicative of a post-welfare society.

Reality Television as Social Welfare

One way in which ideological change is evident is through the emergence of a neoliberalist society or what Oullette and Hay (2008) describe as the ‘post-welfare society’. Neoliberalism strives to reduce the role of government by placing responsibility for an individual’s social welfare on their ability to participate in the labour market (Harris et al. 2014). Harris et al. (2014) continue, querying whether policies adopted in the Australian context such as increasing labour market participation and reducing income support ‘reflect an ideological preference for private control over governmental expenditures’. In a media context, social support is increasingly privatised in such a way that transfers responsibility for social services from governments to private corporations, including television. Specifically, Oullette and Hay argue that reality television is increasingly taking on the role of governments in an effort to combine the pleasures of popular culture with an ideology of neoliberalism, an ideology characterised by a philosophy of self-enterprising citizenship where citizens are encouraged to ‘help themselves’. They describe this as indicative of the neoliberal post-welfare society and identify an
intersection between the reinvention of both government and reality television whereby:

TV’s concern with not only documenting, but with facilitating the care of needy and ‘at risk’ citizens through cultural commerce, philanthropy, and TV-viewer volunteerism is also a way of enacting methods of social service provision that do not involve ‘entitlements’ and models of civic participation that do not ‘depend’ on the Welfare State (Oullette and Hay 2008).

The portrayal of disability in reality television offers a specific narrative to support this claim. For example, a casting call for Extreme Makeover: Home Edition uncovered by the Smoking Gun website in 2006 reveals the ways disability, disease and disadvantage are exploited by reality programming to attract viewers (The Smoking Gun 2006). With reference to the portrayal of disability in this particular program, Gray (2008) explains the show ‘purports to send a message of inspiration and of philanthropy to viewers, with many implicit and explicit calls for audiences to “get out there” and help those around them’. This inspiration comes at the expense of people with disabilities by perpetuating the media narrative that people with disabilities must always be the recipients of charity.

Continuing this theme, Oullette and Hay identify another emerging – and concerning – neoliberalist phenomenon within reality television, whereby ‘in the absence of public welfare programs, hundreds of thousands of people now apply directly to reality TV programs for housing, affordable healthcare, and other forms of assistance’ (Oullette and Hay 2008). Indeed, while the notion of a post-welfare culture is clearly reflected within the narrative of The Dreamhouse itself – the series makes reference to the lack of adequate housing for people with intellectual disability in today’s society and its associated critical reception – reality television such as The Dreamhouse does not actually offer a sustainable solution to housing for people with intellectual disabilities. Although ‘just’ a documentary series, The Dreamhouse is clearly influenced by the reality television format and the ethos of reality television as ad hoc welfare for the most deserving cases. This is reflected in the producers’ statement for the series:

I was aware that there are many young people with ID, International Disabilities (and also many much older people) looking to move out and share a home with friends. But how to make this work financially and practically? For those who don’t receive government accommodation support, the barriers appear impenetrable. Waiting lists are long and usually only those in crisis get to the top of the list. There just isn’t enough resource to go around (Tait 2014).

To put this argument into a wider context, as part of the 2010/2011 budget, the Australian Government committed to a number of strategies to facilitate the social inclusion of people with disability and their carers. The National Disability Strategy (NDS) was intended to offer a 10-year framework for improving the lives of Australians with disabilities and providing greater access to community activities and public space – both media representation and accessible housing were identified as key concerns in this strategy. In 2012, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was introduced as part of the NDS. The scheme aimed to reposition people with disability away from being considered recipients of charity to people who required support to achieve independence. This is a radical social concept that contravenes the constant charity messaging of reality programming such as Extreme Makeover: Home Edition for example. Funding was available via the NDIS to provide ‘reasonable and necessary supports’ to people with a ‘permanent and significant disability’ (NDIS n.d.). The NDIS also takes into account existing informal support structures and funding from other sources in deciding the amount available to individuals.

However, by 2014, funding cuts saw these priorities become deprioritised or outsourced. In addition to funding cuts to the ABC – which resulted in the axing of Ramp Up, an NDS media initiative for Australians with disability (see Department of Social Services 2015) – social welfare for Australians with disability became increasingly tenuous, including the axing of the disability discrimination commissioner and projected cuts to the disability support pension (Ellis and Goggin 2015).

As an example of how these cutbacks have been reflected in daily life, we return to the specific case of The Dreamhouse where the voiceover narration directly positions the housemates’ situation:

Even with national disability insurance, Kirk, Justin and Sarah could still face years on funding waitlists. So The Dreamhouse has been created to help set them on the road to independence.

The mothers of all three housemates concur. Sarah’s mother Julie discusses the problem with support for people with intellectual disability seeking alternative housing outside the family home:

[If Sarah] goes into supported accommodations with any of the big agencies she’s very likely to be with much older people simply because younger people don’t get funding. It’s not until parents are much older and the person needing care is 35 to 40 that you even get considered.

Thus, in Sarah and Julie’s experience, support is contingent on the needs of parents rather than those of
the adult child with intellectual disability. Julie therefore supports 23-year-old Sarah’s move to their so-called dreamhouse because the other housemates are also ‘younger people’. Justin’s mother Margaret describes a similar situation whereby their dreamhouse represents the end of a 10-year search for suitable housing for Justin who is now 32:

He’s ready to make the move now so it’s just a good opportunity really because if we were just going to sit back and wait for this other housing group thing to get going he might have still been living with us when he was 40.

Finally, Kirk’s mother Peta professes a strong belief that Kirk would only have been able to achieve independence by leaving the family home but that she had been at ‘a complete and utter total loss as to where he would live and how we would do that’. The Dreamhouse offers him the opportunity to do just that and, as the series progresses, Kirk is shown as achieving this independence and developing strong social skills. While Peta describes Kirk’s behaviour in the family home as hyperactive and non-stop from when he first woke up in the morning, in The Dreamhouse Kirk acts as a peacemaker, neutralising arguments, offering relationship advice (‘be yourself mate’) and completing all of his household chores.

Forward Thinking or Following Stereotypes: The media’s critique of The Dreamhouse

The Dreamhouse was enthusiastically embraced by the mainstream media, in the main praising it for representing a significantly underrepresented group on television and for highlighting the current social welfare issues they face. The latter is applauded in Kathryn Kernohan’s review for the Sydney Morning Herald:

If not for this manufactured housing arrangement, the parents point out, their children would face years on funding lists to secure appropriate accommodation. The system’s failings are largely left alone, though – this is a show about people, not politics (Kernohan 2014).

It also should be noted that documentaries, despite purporting to represent real life, are actually heavily constructed and have several tools at their disposal to direct the narrative and influence the audience. For example, throughout The Dreamhouse Adam Hills’ voiceover narration offers clear direction in how audiences (and the mainstream media) should interpret the narrative in positive ways. He provides commentary on the housemates’ progress, their lives before the series and what they, their mothers, or their support workers are thinking or feeling at any moment. However, this commentary also glosses over the experience of the housemates. For example, Justin’s loud midnight antics are constructed as a form of rebellion within the house or as anxiety about moving out when he clearly articulates that he is unable to sleep due to a painful tooth abscess. An interesting conversation took place on Twitter regarding this with some commenting being berated for being critical about ‘such a great positive show’ (see further @bronwynhemsley on Twitter).

Therefore, for some, the tightly constructed ‘reality’ narrative is not overly apparent – Kernohan still describes the series as ‘refreshingly free of staged tension’. For others looking beyond this guided narrative, they see, at times, a stereotypical portrayal of intellectual disability.

Further, while the series purports to offer an innovative solution to the problem of housing for young adults with intellectual disability, closer critique reveals this is a misrepresentation of current society – the housing arrangement in The Dreamhouse is far removed from the everyday reality of people with intellectual disability. These critiques were, however, careful to support the participants – for example, Catherine McAlpine, CEO of Down Syndrome Australia, supports Justin, Sarah and Kirk’s decision to participate in the show and applauds the important conversations taking place as a result but, ultimately, finds that The Dreamhouse as a program misleads the audience by presenting a highly curated living situation as the pinnacle of choice and freedom for the participants (McAlpine 2014a; 2014b). In her first critique of the series, McAlpine explains ‘the reality is that many people with Down syndrome continue to live at home both because of the lack of resources and lack of opportunity to pursue an alternative living arrangement’ (McAlpine 2014a).

Taking this argument further, as outlined above, The Dreamhouse relies on a whole crew of volunteer buddies – people whose unpaid labour ensures the social experiment is a success. In addition, the house is located in Subiaco – an affluent Perth suburb where the weekly household income is around $2000 and average rent is $400 (REIWA 2017). Celebrations that the series offers a ‘solution’ to the neoliberal housing problems faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities is therefore also an economic as well as social misrepresentation. As the voiceover narration explains:

Back up the housemates is a team of buddies who are donating their time. They will be crucial to the success of The Dreamhouse. With their support, the housemates will be able to live within their means.

The series concludes with some of these buddies agreeing to stay on in a volunteer capacity to support the housemates to live independently in their Subiaco home, something that is particularly necessary if the housemates want to continue to participate in the
workforce. Further, another service provider in Perth has used representations in The Dreamhouse in their advertising for volunteer carers to positively change the lives of people with intellectual disabilities (Citizen Advocacy n.d.). Finally, City of Subiaco Mayor Heather Henderson praised the series for highlighting the plight of people with intellectual disabilities seeking suitable housing and for offering an innovative solution (City of Subiaco 2014). Yet, while these are billed as success stories associated with The Dreamhouse, again this misrepresents the reality of most people with disabilities also trying to live an independent life – without the assistance of reality television. Similarly, the charity model is reinforced when support is repositioned as charity or something people do to feel better about themselves.

Conclusion

The 2014 ABC television series The Dreamhouse highlights a complex social problem in Australian society – housing support for young adults with an intellectual disability. Although marketed as a documentary series, The Dreamhouse can be situated within a recent cycle of television programming placing responsibility for the social welfare of citizens on reality television and the self-work of the participants therein rather than on governments. Oullette and Hay (2008) describe this as emerging via neoliberal societies and a post-welfare epoch.

The Dreamhouse was subject to both criticisms and applause even before the first episode aired (McAlpine 2014a; Gothard 2014). As the series progressed, the mainstream media responded positively, describing it as ‘more social experiment than reality series’ (Kernohan 2014) – the producers’ statement referred to in this article suggests they were indeed attempting such an experiment. However, a small but vocal section of the audience offered critique of the stereotypes of disability invoked throughout the series, voiced concerns with the overly guided format of the voiceover, and, perhaps more importantly, claimed the housing solution offered was inadequate and misrepresented real life.

This article profiles commentators from each side of the debate to explore the mixed response to the series and the kinds of discourses they draw on in their interpretation of The Dreamhouse as either a stereotypical television show or as an innovative solution to the housing problems experienced by people with intellectual disabilities. Social media offered a platform on which this discussion could take place; however, further research is required to explore the specific ways that contestation for meaning plays out, and how much capacity social media actually has to call people’s attention to the problematic narratives they are being drawn into via these types of programs.

While television is an important medium through which to highlight and discuss these significant social problems, the solution must go beyond perpetuating problematic and infantilising stereotypes and presenting them as innovative solutions ‘to a complex community challenge’ (McAlpine 2014b). Television representation and online discussion nevertheless offer a progressive site through which important social issues such as housing for people with intellectual disability can take place. However, this discussion reflects the social, political, and media environment in which they are produced and cannot be accepted uncritically.

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**Sliced Bread**

Her father didn’t believe in sliced bread, their sandwiches were traditional wobbly-white and thick, cut with a knife. At thirty-three, the hot air about him emphatic, he was silent as he thought a father should be.

At her first-communion party, a ruffle of dainty veils curtained the table, pink-pretty with cup-cakes and sprinklings of hundreds and thousands. A boy turned up his nose, as he fingered the familiar cubes bulky with egg.

She looked away, chose a triangle slim with cheese.

She was the fairy-tale princess determined to rise above the stares.

*Remember when you were so strict about sliced bread?* She might have asked later as her father buttered a Tip Top square.

Their wars had long deflated his authority-balloon now wrinkled in the corner of memory as she eats her bread hand-made, seeded, with the tang of recall and crumbs falling onto her chest.

**Anne Collins,**

**HOBART, TAS**
Inspiration is Power: Voices of information and advocacy for the reader of autism narratives

Michael Whelan

The central idea that the article engages with is that there are at least two fundamentally differing rhetorical positions on autism. The first position is that of the authoritative biomedical voice which identifies and pathologises a collection of behaviours, labels it as ‘located within the autism spectrum’ and then seeks either to measure its degree of severity or to medicate it. The second position is that of the parent of the autistic child who characterises the disorder as a demonised invader of their child, thief of their future and which through acts of heroic intervention can be exorcised. The most potent difference for the lay reader in engaging with these two discourses is the degree to which they limit or enable the reader to act or to respond. Inspiration is Power critiques the roles of biomedical and pathographic texts in telling the stories of autism.

In March 1996, my life changed forever with the birth of my first child, Connor. As with all first-time parents, my world view, philosophical assumptions and personal priorities were tossed into the air and on their return to Earth, settled in a range of locations that I would not previously have been able to foresee. My professional life as a university music lecturer initially became a complicated distraction to the wonders of new life and then, almost as quickly, a snug refuge from the hourly crying, feeding, nappy changing and general chaos that a new baby brings to orderly suburban homes. I cast myself enthusiastically into the role of new committed father with the purchase of a wide range of products designed to telegraph to the public gaze our allegiance to a carefully chosen set of values. We were educated, outdoor, safety conscious, creative parents with an eye on the environment and a subscription to Choice Magazine. Once the dust had settled and a routine was in place, my wife and I immediately planned a second child to partner our first in a life of choreographed adventures, schoolyard discoveries and family bliss. Sixteen months later in July, 1997 our second child Lachlan was born amid a chorus of family joy and triumph and a more sober and informed redistribution of personal priorities and philosophies. Despite the temporary derailment of domestic order and repeated disruption to routine and priorities, we were soon back on the rails with a Disney roadmap of life adventures in place.

However, as Connor approached eighteen months of age, his developmental milestones which to this point had been boringly consistent with statistical norms, began to regress. His language diminished, he started to lose eye contact with us and he began to retreat from all contact with his family and his environment choosing instead, for example, to play repetitively with a single toy for hours at a time. His happy demeanour was now replaced by almost constant crying, restless irritability and self-absorption. His fixation with a single object or ritualistic play routine could see him secluded in his own world for extended periods of time and, if interrupted, was capable of intense and lengthy bouts of uncontrolled screaming. The subtly eccentric behaviours that Connor began to exhibit at eighteen months of age intensified over a four month period to the point where at age twenty-two months we decided to have him assessed by our family GP. The doctor assured my wife and me that while there was some evidence of unusual behaviour and delayed development, she believed that a thorough evaluation by a developmental paediatrician would ease our concerns. Our personal narrative of ‘obsessive parents with quirky child’ was shattered when two weeks before Connor’s second birthday a paediatrician diagnosed him with severe Autism Spectrum Disorder, a life-long condition for which there is no cure. Our colourful family folklore of eccentric cousins and late bloomers was instantly silenced by this unwavering voice of biomedical authority.

After several weeks of numbing and incapacitating grief, we began in a more systematic and strategic way to try to answer the questions that our family and friends were asking and that we were also asking ourselves. What is autism? Is there a cure? What is the treatment? What do other parents do when their child is diagnosed with autism? What will Connor be like when he is an adult? Will he recover? Will everything ever be normal again?
Thus began our journey of research and therapeutic intervention that continues to this day. Our research over the following months and years emerged from two very different genres of writing, each speaking to a distinctly different audience. The first was the biomedical voice which focuses on the physical processes of illness such as the pathology, biochemistry and the physiology of disease and which speaks to the scientific reader. The second was the parental autobiography – the personal account from parents of their journeys parenting a child with autism, providing emotional and practical roadmaps for action and speaking to a much broader general readership.

In the years immediately following Connor’s diagnosis, I was passionate and driven to succeed in my search to understand and perhaps even cure my son’s autism. While the term ‘lay’ normally operates within a religious setting, the certainty provided by the search for a cure and hope for my child empowered me with the moral authority, if not spiritual zeal, to boldly engage with this foreign literature. Like most religious orthodoxies, biomedical science operates within a similarly structured hegemonic setting of jealously guarded specialised knowledge (Gwyn 2002; Silverman 1987) whose alternative readings may be strenuously opposed. This literature search was the beginning of what has become a personal quest narrative of hope and recovery. Gwyn (2002) writes of three dominant strategies in medical narrative. The first is the restitution narrative in which health is regarded as the normal state to which the ‘sick’ person will be ultimately restored. The second is the chaos narrative where the illness lacks causality, sense and a predictable trajectory while subverting the expectation that one event leads to another. The third and final narrative that Gwyn discusses is the quest narrative. Loosely based on the Jungian notion of the monomyth, the quest narrative follows the arc of a hero who suffers, acquires knowledge and then returns triumphantly to make that knowledge known. In my own rhetorical way, I hitched my wagon to this caravan of wounded storytellers on a rescue mission to slay the dragon of autism.

The American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) (2013) speaks directly to psychiatrists, general practitioners and allied health workers around the world. Unlike most biomedical discourses that deal with diagnosis and pathology, the DSM is notably devoid of a narrative metaphor such as bio-militarism. Bio-militarism grew in popularity based upon Pasteur’s concept of the disease as invading agent and Koch’s adversarial description of the aggressive bacteria. Military metaphors such as attacking viruses, defences being weak and fighting infection not only proliferate the majority of biomedical narratives, but also pathographic narratives where frequent attacks, battles and victories characterise the dramatic arc of most stories. Illness as Metaphor (Sontag 1978) profoundly influenced the characterisation of illness and the mythology of patient as victim in an adversarial relationship. The absence of this common metaphor in the DSM text may be due to the discipline’s focus upon behavioural presentation rather than pathological causation.

In addition to the biomedical texts that articulate every aspect of the disorder’s symptomatology, pathology and prognosis, I encountered a body of illness narratives chronicling the experience of parenting a child with autism. Books such as The Siege and Exiting Nirvana (Clayborn-Park 1967, 2002), Let Me Hear Your Voice (Maurice 1993) and Facing Autism by (Hamilton 2000) were benchmark texts in the genre and required reading for any parent of a child newly-diagnosed with autism. Emergence, Labelled Autistic (Grandin 1986) and Nobody Nowhere (Williams 2002) delivered fascinating insights into the autistic experience. The narratives of these human lives, unlike the socially neutered biomedical hosts, were rich in emotion, inspiration and personal experience and spoke directly to the human experience.

But what is a narrative? An expansive body of scholarship in modern narratology draws upon two primary intellectual schools: the Anglo-American work of James, Lubbock, Forster and Booth with Russian formalist influences of Schlovsky, Eichenbaum, Jakobsen and Propp, and the French structuralist approaches of Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Genette and Todorov (Chatman 1980: 121). Chatman goes on to suggest that, ‘Narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent of its medium. In other words, narrative is basically a kind of text organization, and that organization, that schema, needs to be actualised: in written words, as in stories . . . ’ And more specifically, what is a pathographic narrative? Hawkins describes pathography as the ‘autobiographical or biographical narrative about the experience of illness’. For the purposes of this essay, I refine this category further to specifically discuss the stories of parents writing relational narratives of their children with illness or disability; let’s say pedia-pathography.

While the term ‘narrative’ provides a snug umbrella for the range of pathographic testimonies that tell autism stories, how does narrative analysis connect with the biomedical text? Does the biomedical voice have a story to tell? Segal (2005: 59) notes that, ‘Narrative has found a place in health research, not only among the social science and humanities researchers but also among some medical researchers as the default opposite of biomedical discourse’. She goes on to suggest that rhetorical enquiry into the scientific narrative is providing deep insights into the traditions, audience and methods of the biomedical voice. Oliver Sacks’s narratological
accounts of patient stories in *The Man Who Mistook his Wife For a Hat* (1995) and *Musicophilia* (2007) deliver potent parallel counterpoints to the biomedical script. Segal (2005: 61) writes, ‘opening up social science to literary theory, hermeneutics, and phenomenology, rescues social science from being strangulated by empirical foundationalism’. Rouse (1996) suggests that while the legitimacy of the scientific narrative is grounded in a number of well-established traditions, there is no canonical ‘meta-narrative’ into which all of its many ‘stories’ can be resolved unlike the pathographic account of illness which finds its readers browsing through the creative non-fiction shelves of any suburban bookshop.

While Rouse (1996) questions the absence of a unifying narratological schema in the scientific stories, there is no doubting the rigorous traditions of evidence-based scholarship that underpins them. Further analysis into the way in which the scientific voice communicates with its collective readership provides valuable insights into the specific device that can impact the lay reader. The DSM’s diagnostic criteria are used to set protocols for everything from health plan reimbursement for doctors and hospitals, style guides for academic journals, to assisting suburban general practitioners with complex diagnoses (Hacking 1995). The narrative plotting of the DSM can be best described as a linear reductive sequence. Each chapter commences by characterising broad features of the disorder and then progressively addresses more specific issues of associated features, age and gender issues, prevalence and familial patterns, and then concludes by proposing a finite set of diagnostic criteria.

The collaborative authorial voice is an anonymous collective of the scientific and intellectual elite gathered under the corporate banner of the American Psychiatric Association. However, the highly objectified scientific style of the voice fails to locate the authorship in any specific cultural or ethnic context. The absolute absence of reference to social or cultural processes or to related scholarship in the field of enquiry suggests an almost biblically omnipotent super-monologue existing on all continents simultaneously. The tactic of making content everything and expression nothing was suggested by Barthes (1996: 58) who went on to say that the scientist as author must become ‘an anonymity, an absence, a blank space’. The DSM has coopted this authorial timbre with an exacting vigour.

The implied audience of the DSM could be collectively characterised as the scientific or clinical reader. The technical language used in the text starkly reinforces the barrier between those who can understand, and those who cannot. Barthes (1996: 58) writes that a professional discourse of this nature ‘exalts, reassures all the subjects *inside*, rejects and offends those *outside*’ although my response rather than that of offence, was that I found its certainty reassuring but its coldness numbing. The mystification of the ordinary, through jargon and specialised language that is the hallmark of most scientific writing is minimal in the DSM, which articulates with depth and clarity a wide range of social, behavioural and developmental problems. The glaring omission in the text for the lay reader is the absolute lack of empathy and social context for the narrative. The lay reader could be forgiven for assuming the disorder under examination resides in a social and cultural vacuum.

The overall motive of the DSM seems to be to globally standardise the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness through a coherent technical discourse. No doubt the primary motive of such socially and culturally barren writing is to limit the opportunity for misinterpretation for this global professional audience, to negate the difference between a point of view with the point of view. The role of social translation and cultural enrichment is presumably left to the suburban general practitioner or specialist physician to interpret these barren clinical facts and unravel the implications for the patient, their family and the uncertain future that awaits them. The process of dehydrating food for long-term preservation comes to mind, where at the moment prior to packaging, every particle of moisture is removed to maintain the ongoing integrity of the food, only to be reconstituted to its original state with the user adding life-giving water. The role of the medical practitioner could not be more crucial in this process of rehydrating a dry and barren message from its cryogenically frozen state for human consumption. Their ability to contextualise this socio-culturally neutered text for the patient is of utmost importance, but personal experience suggests to me that the re-humanising of this rarefied voice at the coalface of primary care is not a foregone conclusion.

Without schooling in the codes and mores of the medical voice, it is possible my quest narrative was doomed to fail without the necessary immersion in this scholarly discipline. Eco (1979: 32) describes the author arranging text through a series of codes that assign meaning to the expressions he uses. He writes that, ‘To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader’. My experience of the DSM is that it doesn’t contain deeply coded narratives of human experience, cultural impact and social implication. And consequently as a lay reader, I was unable to process the text and access the rich human layers of this invisible apparatus by taking what Eco (1979) describes as inferential walks. Scholes (1981) suggests that these inferential walks are the construction of meaning by the reader filling in the text with their own ghost chapters.
With regard to the process of communication, Mailloux (1989) writes that a text is frequently interpreted against the background of codes different from those intended by the author. But perhaps the intertextual frames of the lay reader are insufficient to inspire the quest narrative in its inferential walks through the biomedical discourse. I took my own inferential walks in a range of clinical journals and medical texts, however, the brisk strolls took me into barren cul-de-sacs that offered little intellectual sustenance and even less inspiration to act.

While the DSM can be seen by the lay reader as a detached and rarefied medical narrative, it neatly reinforces the paradigmatic frame of the medical textbook. Macdonald (2002) observes that the medical text subscribes to a model or code that governs its linguistic practices. These codes are not part of a linguistic system, but are a symbolic system of meaning generated by the medical social system. Macdonald (2002) goes on to suggest that the medical textbook as a genre is most clearly identified through its lack of rhetorical features. This lack of rhetorical device then implies that its contents are self-evident and that its claims to validity can be unequivocally accepted.

Fisher (1991) suggests that in this relationship between medicine and society, doctors hold the dominant powerful voice by virtue of their exclusivity in controlling the bioscientific discourse. She observes that Fisher (1991: 159) calls for a 'more humanistic, patient-centred medical practice which includes both social-psychological and medical aspects of patients' lives'. However, one problem with a more patient-centred discourse is that unlike the scientific voice whose traditions unite their stories in a single style, the pathographic voice lacks a unifying stylistic feature.

The emergence in recent times of the specific discipline of illness narrative or pathography has served to contest the biomedical account of the human experience of illness. Hawkins (1999) writes,

Pathography returns the voice of the patient to the world of medicine, a world where that voice is too rarely heard, and it does so in such a way as to assert the phenomenological, the subjective, and the experiential side of illness . . . Pathography restores the person ignored or cancelled out in the medical enterprise, and it places that person at the very center. Moreover, it gives that ill person a voice.

The return of the voice to the person/patient not only restores a sense of balance to the illness conversation but it has also contributed to the ascent of memoir and autobiography as the emerging literary genre of the 21st century. Gilmore (2001) notes that while memoir was previously associated primarily with the lives of elder statesmen, it is now 'dominated by the young . . . whose private lives are emblematic of a cultural moment'. She also goes on to note that the commercial sales of memoirs have tripled in the last fifty years.

Most pathographies follow some variation of the narrative arc of the quest narrative. Propp (Riceour 1981) writes of the heroic quest that:

In these tales, a hero meets a challenge .... which he is sent to overcome. Throughout the quest, he is confronted with a series of trials which require that he choose to fight rather than to yield or flee, and which finally end in victory.

The sudden departure from this rose-tinted view of parenthood becomes a constant touchstone throughout the memoir until the validity of the preconceived notion of life as a parent is slowly drawn into question.

With the passing of each year since we began our journey of therapeutic intervention and personal transformation, Park's two memoirs, The Siege and Exiting Nirvana, eclipse both Maurice's and Hamilton's memoirs in their narrative's lingering impact. The desperate language of hope combined with the forensic observations of behaviour and intervention, while compelling in those first moments of diagnosis, now seem slightly anachronistic. Park's narrative style keeps the reader at a slightly greater distance from the minutiae of daily routines so distractingly prevalent in both Maurice and Hamilton and consequently delivers narratives that linger more poignantly in memory. And the biomedical texts that loomed so large as monoliths of inmoveable truth in my son's early days of diagnosis have eroded significantly. While their message has remained constant, the breadth of experience and miles travelled allows my inferential walks a more panoramic vista.

Both the biomedical and pathographic discourses tell their stories with compelling voices, but the parental autobiographical narratives provide potent conduits for inspiration. While these damaged storytellers lack the universality of style or coherence of voice present in the biomedical text, their intimate stories connect at a deep level with fellow travellers. A discussion of the emerging dissonance between the evidence upon which pathographers underpin their truths combined with the authority they claim to tell their stories may provide useful insights.

In 1676, Isaac Newton wrote in a letter to his colleague Robert Hooke, 'If I have seen farther, it is by standing on
the shoulders of giants’ (Hawking 2002: IX). While Newton in this instance was referring to his discoveries in optics, the quote has been used by the sciences ever since as a mantra to consolidate the role of evidence-based scientific research in building a brick by brick cathedral of knowledge. But the experience of the last ten years tells me that sole reliance upon the institutional monotheism of the scientific narrative is not enough. Information without the permission or power to act is not enough. The total absence of a social context in the medical textbook ensures a complete erasure of humanity in line with the guiding ideological principles of the biomedical voice. While the emphasis in scientific discourse must be to limit the opportunity for misinterpretation with neutral and exclusionary language, the absence of any other contextual description may serve to reinforce the readers’ view of pathology without humanity, illness without impact, pain without feeling.

The glaring omission in the biomedical text for the lay reader is the absolute lack of empathy and social context. The lay reader could be forgiven for assuming the disorder under examination resides in the social and cultural vacuum of a petri dish, free from the complications of human emotion. However, nothing is more pervasive and complicated than human emotion when addressing an infant with special needs. Unlike other disabilities, which may be diagnosed at birth or even in utero, autism’s late onset leaves the parent unprepared for their child’s slow and painful departure from their loving gaze to destinations unknown. This late symptomological onset from unknown causes places the parental reader in a much more vulnerable space and therefore potentially more susceptible to influence.

For the readers of autism narratives, no single discourse can meet all of the emotional, intellectual and philosophical needs that empower or inspire the individual to act. From my experience the pathographic relational narrative, while lacking the empirical pedigree of the biomedical voice, gives parents of newly-diagnosed children hope and agency at a time when they have very little of either. This does not mean that the biomedical discourse is not extremely important and influential, because to act on the advice of desperate and emotional parents alone seems a dangerous leap of faith. On the other hand, I have a poem titled Welcome to Holland (Kingsley 1987) from a grieving mother describing the experience of grief, dislocation and hope following the diagnosis of her child with a disability taped to my study wall to provide me with agency and energy, not a chapter from the DSM.

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Michael Whelan is an academic, writer, musician and autism advocate. In addition to his memoir, The Other Country: A Father’s Journey with Autism, Michael also wrote the documentary film What are you doing? This educational film for school audiences on the topic of social inclusion and autism was distributed to every school in Australia and was screened at the United Nations in New York as part of World Autism Day activities in April 2013.
Through Autism Queensland, Michael developed and commenced delivery of Studio G, a post-school transition program for young people with autism. In July 2015, Michael joined Queensland University of Technology as an Associate Professor in Music in the Creative Industries Faculty where he continues his work supporting young people on the autism spectrum.

More than one way

There’s more than one way to peel an orange. You could start with the pointy end of a knife, lick the juice from fingers, that sweetened accent, pulp on white paper towels absorb running words

you could start with the pointy end of a knife.
Push it into skin, some thicker than others, pulp on white paper towels absorb running words cradled by your fingers, slice in wedges and peel.

Push the knife into skin, some thicker than others just deep enough to touch the flesh cradled by your fingers, slice in wedges and peel.
Or you could dig in with fingernails raking just deep enough to touch the flesh small jolts of orange to smell out your day.
Or you could dig in with fingernails raking from the corners, pushing up flesh to mouths and teeth small jolts of orange to smell out your day.
Shave off skin for rind. Cut in quarters and freeze.
From the corners push up flesh to mouths and teeth.
It grew roots and recipes before this cutting on bench tops.

There’s more than one way to start your day lick the juice from fingers, that sweetened accent filling your mouth with this everyday taste.
There’s more than one way to peel an orange.

CLAIRE ROSSLYN WILSON,
BARCELONA, CATALONIA/WINDSOR, VIC
she remembers dying

in the death of things
colours were so much more alive for her
where the gold of sunlight through branches
sliced her into a thousand slivers
she sat on the ledge twelve stories up wondering
whether to climb out
the window and down

in her game of hide seek and freak
when she thought of other versions of herself
the ones where all her sacrifices hung
swelling the air in the room with the concealment
of grief and some evil sort of free will
she drew herself into separate parts
in the hope she could forget how much armour
she needed
while she sailed outrage on a flood
of swearing at anyone in uniform
on the bus the train and the police
they looked upon her
as just another crazy foreigner

all the while she was trying to find the seventeen year old girl
who sat cross legged in the park with her best friend
laughing at the silliness of life
that lead right back to the start where it all happened
and then not remembering the place where it did

hers was the death that took all her life to happen
and for her to remember

Avenida de America

back where I set out this morning I ascend from line six
the circle line with the deepest tunnels and hear, perhaps
feel, vibrations of a saraband bowed on a viola trembling

through the pulsating galleries of Avenida de America and
soon come upon an old man sitting close by an old woman
while he plays as once he may have played for audiences

who sat silent in vaulted halls and clapped when he paused
not storming homebound at the knell of a toiled-away day
but his cup is lined with grey velvet and brims with Euros

more than I've witnessed with busker or beggar anywhere
an approbation perhaps of Bach's meditations on mortality
which pursue me as I rise up through subterranean arcades

fading to little more than distant sighs then dying before
I'm released into the Madrid night of crowds, clamour, cars,
sirens, whiffs of diesel, cigarette smoke, coffee, perfume

and I'm standing on a concrete island in Avenida de America
gazing at the veil of electric haze closing out the sky yet fired
with vain and eager hopes I might somehow see some stars

Pym Schaare,
Brisbane, QLD

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Power and Social Change: The case of the European social justice movement

DALILAH A. REUBEN-SHEMIA

For achieving bottom-up social change, internalised notions of the logic of power and social change can have an impact on the effectiveness of social movements. Nonviolent action theory refers to two conceptions of power: monolithic and relational. Evidence of these conceptions can be found in the online self-portrayals of two activist networks in the social justice movement for a more inclusive, democratic and fair Europe. These self-descriptions suggest that a top-down view of power is widespread even among more radical European social justice activists, posing an obstacle to successfully strategising for bottom-up change.

Introduction

Increasing unemployment, poverty and social inequalities are contributing to a strengthening of the far right in many European countries (Standing 2011: 2; Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2016: 11). In the light of continuing austerity politics promoted by the European Union (EU) it seems that movements for social justice have not been very effective so far. The factors contributing to this situation are numerous. Factors that activists themselves can influence could be forms of organisation, types of leadership, effective framing of demands and political discourses (Tarrow 2011: 119). The focus of this article is on implicit internalised models of the way change can be achieved, which might then influence strategy, perhaps hindering campaigns from developing their full potential.

One useful framework for assessing the effectiveness of movements is nonviolent action (NVA) theory, which provides helpful concepts as part of a model towards explaining social change. Core to this framework is the notion that how activists think about the way power operates in society influences how they try to change it. Their approach of protest and action is related to the underlying concept of power. The question is, how and in what ways do these notions influence strategy and action and the way this manifests itself in the approach to social change.

Previous research on NVA has been primarily focused on movements for basic democratic rights and against authoritarian regimes (see Ackermann and DuVall: 2000), particularly on explicit NVA cases with an emphasis on the description of the methods used (McCarthy and Kruegler 1993: 22). However, there is a research gap when it comes to the application of the concepts from NVA studies on socio-economic struggles and understanding its dynamics especially in contexts other than bipolar ruler-ruled situations. Moreover, this framework has not yet been used in European social movement research, which primarily considers descriptive analysis of phenomenological elements without an underlying theory of change that can be used to assess their strategies (cf. della Porta 2009). This paper aims to help fill this research gap, moving beyond mere description of types of action towards strategy oriented research and introducing some basic concepts of NVA to European protest analysis. This issue can be relevant to both academics and activists, as it contributes analytically to existing efforts to broaden the nonviolence research framework, traditionally used in peace and democratisation studies and to also include socio-economic struggles for social justice on a transnational level.

First some central concepts of NVA theory will be introduced to support the analysis of the cases in the subsequent section. Two cases reflecting key tendencies of the overall European social justice movement will be examined. They will illustrate the proposition that the way power works may have an impact on the effectiveness of approaches to social change.

Social Change and the View of Power

This section will introduce some concepts of NVA theory, which will be helpful in the next step of analysis of the case studies. When official channels of conventional politics are not effective in involving participation of the population in decision-making, social change can be induced by NVA (Sharp 1973: 3). This is an
Researchers studying the social dynamics that explain the mechanisms and logic of change on which NVA campaigns are based have developed key concepts that are important for understanding why and how civil resistance works. Gene Sharp, a pioneering thinker in this field of research, is a political theorist who studied a huge number of struggles and compiled a grounded theory based on historical evidence.

His model of how social change can be achieved without arms and when institutionalised channels are not available or ineffective is based upon the logic of power in society. According to Sharp:

All responses to the 'how' of dealing with an opponent's power are rooted in assumptions about the nature of power. An erroneous or inadequate view of the nature of political power is unlikely to produce satisfactory and effective action for dealing with it (Sharp 1973: 8).

He claims that there are two basic notions of the nature of power: the 'monolith' view of power and the consent theory of power (ibid.: 9). According to the first conception, which Sharp claims is the most widely held but not accurate, power is either intrinsic to the person of the ruler, or tied to his or her position. According to this notion, which I will henceforth call the top-down view of power, there are three main ways of achieving change either:

- a) by voluntary self-restraint of the power-holder (e.g. after being persuaded),
- b) by replacing those in power-positions (e.g. regularly by elections or irregularly by a coup d'état), or
- c) by destructive violence (conventional or civil war).

Yet this view leaves out and is unable to explain all those cases in which ordinary people had been repeatedly able to challenge authority and make political and social change without making use of the above means but by putting massive but nonviolent pressure on the opponent. Examples include toppling many non-democratic regimes in African and Latin American countries from the 1940s on, the overthrow of the dictator Marcos in the Philippines in 1986; overcoming apartheid in South Africa; bringing down Suharto, the president of Indonesia in 1998 and Milosevic in Serbia two years later.

An alternative notion though is able to fill this gap. According to the second view, which I will refer to as the bottom-up view of power, all regimes, regardless of whether democratic or autocratic, depend on the consent of the people, in the form of active contributions, cooperation, obedience, and carrying out orders and tasks. Power is thus a social relationship and not a fixed quantum of a resource. By withdrawing consent or support, for example by not cooperating, not obeying anymore, the power of the ruler can be kept in check, influenced or even destroyed. Campaigners must consequently target the social roots of political power, like human and material resources (Sharp 1973: 10). In an adapted version of this view, the image of pillars supporting the status quo is offered, which refer to organisations, institutions or parts of society that 'contain the sources of power and provide the structures for collective action' (Helvey 2004: 18). These pillars of support might for instance include the military, police, the educational system, media, youth, business, religious organisations and more (ibid.: 9). Moreover, the image of the pillars can also be applied to parts of society supporting a certain view or discourse, thus parts of the population contribute to public opinion (Engler and Engler 2016: 100). These are all elements, that in various ways, 'provide a regime with the backing it needs to survive' (ibid.: 92). Thus, in order to challenge a government, one after another of these parts of society contributing to the continuation of the status quo have to be won over, undermined or neutralised, by persuasion or public pressure.

The types of actions a movement chooses are possible indicators of the underlying view of power of its participants. Examples of strategies based on the formal structures of the political system are those that centrally rely on petitions and those seeking to shift the parliamentary balance between parties thus mobilising for certain political factions or their representatives. When it is believed that policy changes can only be imposed top-down by those in government, the movement will try to replace those in power-positions by alternative candidates who are perceived as more suitable for implementing the desired changes. This is illustrated by the case of the left-wing coalition Syriza that was brought to government in Greece in 2015 due to widespread support with the mandate to reverse structural adjustment programs of the economy. However, Syriza implemented even harsher measures than those previously rejected by the people (Boukalas and Müller 2015: 392) as its formal position did not endow the party with enough 'powers' to resist economic forces. The population was very disappointed as it expected that replacing those 'in power' would be the solution to their problems. This case illustrates how a strategy based on the top-down view of power may be ineffective in achieving its actual goals.

Yet when it comes to strategies of persuasion of power-holders, the distinction between the top-down
and bottom-up view is not as clear and obvious. The attempt to change the views of those in power positions can either appeal to the self-restraint of rulers, one of the possibilities of change according to the top-down view of power, or to the persuasion of the rulers by the population based on the bottom-up view of power. One way to distinguish between the two is to look at the extent to which the population is included and addressed by persuasion attempts. For instance, is the campaign mainly working on an expert level, trying to draft legislation, muster evidence and arguments to lobby governing parties, or does it work on a society-wide scale by trying to shift public opinion and thus change the hegemonic ideology in this way? The first approach is based on the assumption that the opponent needs to be convinced on the intellectual level by better arguments, while the latter strategy aims at the pillar of public support. In a social change strategy based on the bottom-up view of power, ‘[i]t is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces’ (Gandhi 1930).

However, besides the underlying view of power, there are other factors, beyond the scope of this paper, that will determine the outcome of a campaign, including the handling of violence by activists, as remaining nonviolent and making repression backfire against the opponent are part of the art of successful NVA.

Categories in Table 1 will be used in the next section. Hereby the approach towards social change will be the guiding category for analysis, for this being the observable expression of the underlying view of power.

These categories can be helpful in formulating hypotheses related to the research question introduced at the beginning of this paper: how do the underlying notions of power influence strategy and action and how does this manifest itself in the approach to social change?

Hypothesis 1: A top-down view of power is reflected in an approach to social change aiming at convincing or replacing those in power.

Hypothesis 2: A bottom-up view of power is reflected in an approach to social change aiming at shifting public opinion and power relations, whereby actions are used to target the societal pillars that contribute to the continuation of the status quo.

Hypothesis 3: Movements appear to have ambivalent notions of power, drawing on both top-down and bottom-up views.

### Table 1: Theoretical Framework as pattern of analysis

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Top-Down View of Power</th>
<th>Bottom-Up View of Power</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 View of power</td>
<td>Power as tied to social/political positions</td>
<td>Power as a social relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Social change approach</td>
<td>Convincing or replacing decision makers</td>
<td>Shifting public opinion and/or power relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Targeting power structures</td>
<td>Formal structures of political system have more weight than social roots of power</td>
<td>Pillars contributing to the continuation of status quo are targeted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Role of actions for strategy</td>
<td>Merely symbolic to influence decision makers</td>
<td>Targeting power relation/pillars of support</td>
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### Case Studies

**Case selection and description**

This section will briefly introduce the case studies with their main characteristics then analyse them with the NVA framework in the following sub-chapter.

Since the onset of the financial crisis in 2007/08 there have been numerous, repeated and diverse forms of protest and action in Europe addressing issues of social and economic justice. These include protests for a fairer distribution of the risks and burdens of the financial crisis, especially targeting economic policies of the European Union, with a focus on the European Commission and the European Central Bank (Mattoni and della Porta 2014: 23). In addition, there have been protests against the politics of austerity, the privatisation of public goods throughout Europe – especially vital ones such as water (Hachfeld 2008: 3). Finally, campaigns
have been organised against international agreements that are perceived as a threat to social equality and justice, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

In order to sum up all those different campaigns and movements, I propose the artificial category 'European social justice movement' (ESJM) for analytical purposes. Member-organisations, groups and individuals might not refer to themselves as being part of a movement with this term. While there are thus numerous organisations, networks and exchange platforms, I will focus on extra-parliamentary activities aiming at social change beyond the means of conventional politics, as I am interested in the dynamics of NVA that deal with conflicts for which 'regular institutional procedures are rarely available' (Sharp 1973: 3) or where those are not effective, based on the diagnosed democratic deficit of the EU (Follesdal and Hix 2005: 6). Networks that are related to political parties, such as Transform Europe which is the official political foundation of the European Left Party, are not among the analysed cases, even if counted as part of the ESJM.

After applying the above selection criteria of a) belonging to the category of the ESJM, and b) pursuing an extra-institutional approach to social change, two main networks as possible case studies for analysis remain: Alter Summit and Beyond Europe.

Neither is explicitly part of the NVA tradition of thought and action. Notwithstanding I selected them because the NVA framework can be a tool for analysis for every movement or group that pursues social change without using violence and beyond merely institutionalised forms of politics. It is not necessarily only applicable when activists consciously label their actions as nonviolent methods (Schock 2003: 706).

For data on their respective approaches to social change I draw on information on their respective websites, including declarations of demands, stated strategies and actions, calls for support and self-descriptions, as these are the only sources of information regarding how they aim to achieve their goals, namely the type of actions they advocate and use and their role in the context of the wider declared strategies.

Alter Summit (AS) is a network of numerous organisations from all over Europe with some degree of institutional leverage, including trade unions, foundations, think tanks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for a more inclusive and fair Europe. Its members are 154 organisations that have signed 'the call for an alter summit' (see link in AS 2017 for listing). Beyond Europe (BE) is comprised of five comparatively small political groups from Germany, Great Britain, Greece and Cyprus, demanding a Europe beyond nations, states and capitalism (see link in BE 2013 for list).

Founded in 2013, both aspire to a Europe of social justice and democracy. Amidst well organised transnational political and economic structures of their opponents, both networks aim to unite forces across borders, to exchange and discuss experiences and outlooks in order to coordinate and improve resistance and protest internationally. Despite these commonalities, what divides them are the identification of the targeted opponent, long-term demands, short-term goals and the types of actions used for these purposes, which will be explained in more detail below.

The publicly declared strategy agreed upon by the members of AS is twofold. The long-term plan is to create a broad common campaign that unites all the different organisations and issues involved. Heading in that direction, initially the goal will be to communicate an unambiguous statement that can be supported by a large part of the public (AS 2016). This proposition and the resulting common campaign is intended to be about the universality of social rights, meaning employment, income, housing, social security, health, and education for everyone. Concrete issues on the way to this broader goal include 'working hours, a minimum wage, the struggle against privatisation, the struggle against social dumping, equal treatment of migrants and citizens, public education and health not subject to market mechanisms’ (ibid.). Accordingly, the addressee of actions and demands are national governments and the EU parliament while by my observation at two AS meetings (Athens 2013 and Brussels 2016) most participants were NGO staff, trade union officers, researchers at foundations plus some left-wing members of the European parliament and their assistants.

The types of activities considered, according to their online self-portrayal, are international days of action (like the European day of action against health care commercialisation or a symbolic social strike by migrants and refugees), rallies during conferences of representatives of the economy and states (like the Group of 20, the Africa-EU Trade Summit, or the World Climate Conference), as well as meeting at least once per year in order to plan and exchange experiences, as they did in Athens, Paris and Brussels.

The members of BE, however, are not satisfied with demands addressing the state or supra-state institutions with the plea of improving the current situation, as they all share an anti-capitalist identity. At least rhetorically they want to overcome the structures that produced grievances in the first place. Therefore, their declared strategy consists of the following three main points: a) spread a radical critique of state, nation and capitalism, b) promote self-organisation, and c) build a 'counter-power' to the aforementioned targets (BE 2013). As such, the identified opponents are not tangible or concrete but broad and abstract categories. However, they leave
these general orientations as an open process, as they also want to be free to react to and embrace locally emerging struggles.

Due to the openness of strategy, the focus has shifted from capitalism in the beginning, to racism, nationalism and militarism during the course of events as the content of activities published online reflect. The types of actions and activities include disruptive blockades, occupations, rallies, protesting at conferences of representatives of the economy and states, as well as meeting during other activists’ meetings in order to exchange experiences and plan further campaigns, for example at NoBorder Camps (see Beyond Borders 2016), conferences on transnational activism, or preparation for G20 protests.

The differences between the two networks mainly lie with the type of member-organisations, the respective rhetoric and stated approaches, with AS composed of institutionalised organisations, while BE consists of grassroots political groups working outside the political system and thus being more radical in stated demands and goals.

In being so different, together they represent the diverse and contradictory currents within a broader movement for an alternative social vision of Europe. However, the two camps do not operate entirely separately. At certain peak events of civil disobedience and actions of civil resistance, such as blockading the European Central Bank or protesting the G20 meeting, these two camps overlap and cooperate as well.

### Analysis of the cases

After having briefly introduced both cases, we can turn to the initial question of how notions of power actually influence action and strategy in these two cases of European social justice networks.

#### Alter Summit

In the founding manifesto of AS (2013), it is stated: ‘our responsibility is to change the balance of power [...] in order to [...] build genuine political, social and economic democracy in Europe’. However, the rest of this text mainly deals with demands addressed to political leaders of Europe and not at all on how to shift the balance of power. While they are withdrawing consent from the politics of the EU on a verbal level in this declaration (‘we refuse to be governed by a self-appointed European oligarchy’), their overall strategy and activities speak a different language. According to keynote speakers on paths towards social change during the conference ‘Social Rights For All’ this shift in the balance of power is apparently meant to be on the level of matching parliamentary forces (cf. Albarracin 2016). That is to say, the proposals refer to certain policies to be implemented, in the case of electoral victory on the level of power.
of EU parliament, as becomes clear with the question ‘[w]hat to do if the progressive forces rule ...’ (Albarracín 2016: 14) formulated by an EU parliament employee. According to the bottom-up view though, power does not reside with certain positions. Replacing those in key positions of political decision making does thus not necessarily mean that the new position-holder will then have the power to actually induce change.

Yet the path to change chosen by AS rather reveals a belief that the way society is and functions can be influenced by parliamentary politics, and by modification of existing laws or introduction of new ones. Therefore, people attached to the AS pursue strategies of either convincing the governing politicians of different policies on an expert level, or, as this does not seem to work, to support and invest in progressive parties on the European level, in order to ensure that interests of workers and issues of social justice will not be neglected. The main attention is dedicated towards the precise formulation of a critique, alternatives and demands in the form of declarations and petitions, as social change is thought to be induced either by persuasion of those in power, or by replacement of decision makers.

In the context of the wider strategy of AS actions the mobilising of support for elections or petitions serves as a secondary tool to obtain public attention and raise awareness of the cause. They are thus characterised by a symbolic nature as they do not offer much of a direct challenge to authorities. As members of AS are trade unions, NGOs, as well as party-attached foundations and think tanks, their integration into established institutions entails risks of losing privileges and institutional legitimacy. Their conferences thus serve the purpose of refining declared demands, more than developing a strategy or an escalating plan as to how these demands should be enforced.

Notwithstanding, AS targets the pillar of public opinion by spreading a critique of social inequality and injustice in Europe and educating the public on the backgrounds of the debt crises. This creates greater awareness in the media, but also among trade union members, that the current direction cannot be followed much longer and there is a need for change.

Yet, while on the one hand their members themselves have diagnosed a considerable democratic deficit regarding the institutions of the EU (Pickhaus 2016: 10) and a decline of the ability of Europeans to actually have a say in European policy-making (AS 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), the heavy reliance on the means of conventional politics (petitions, rallies, declarations) implies a continuing belief in the effectiveness of democratic participation mechanisms, as these are all forms of institutionalised channels of exertion of democratic influence of the population. Accordingly, their assessment on the one hand and their actual approach of acting on the other hand do not fit together but contradict each other. The internalised concepts of the way members of AS traditionally sought to effect politics during previous years and decades, namely by proposing policy recommendations to decision-makers stand in sharp contrast to their evaluation of what the current situation requires. That is to shift the balance of power in society, however this may be defined. For instance, in a proposal circulating among the members (‘re-constituting Europe’) there is talk of unfavourable power relations within Europe and its member states and the paper even concludes with referring to the necessity for civil disobedience regarding some European laws (ENB [Europa Neu Begründen] 2016). Yet, the overall proposal is dedicated to minimum protections of social and workers’ rights, while the methods for enforcing the demands are left vague.

Beyond Europe

Expressions used by BE appear to be more far-reaching and perhaps radical, yet ultimately an underlying misconception of the logic of power and social change seems to block the way to success.

In the ‘Base text’ and ‘About us’ sections on the website of BE, the term power is used several times as something that can be collectively developed to finally form a ‘counter-power’ to the opponents, meaning the state, nation and capital. Thus, power is not so much perceived as a relation but more as a resource or a skill. As the one side has it, the other has to also build it up and become comparably strong in the same areas, in order to form a counterweight keeping the opponent in check.

This ‘counterweight’, in terms of a discursive counter-power in a battle of arguments, can be constructed by formulating an informed critique of the status quo, publicising these analysed grievances with the help of actions, and then transmitting these ideas to others. In addition to critique, they want to promote self-organisation. Both tasks reflect a willingness to withdraw consent, on the one hand discursively (spreading of critique) and on the other hand building up the ability to withdraw cooperation (by self-organisation). In this sense on a rhetorical level, their approach seems to be shaped by a bottom-up view of power.

Actions have three main roles. They are meant as an expression of the activists’ disagreement with the current situation. But this is also a form of explicit distancing from mainstream thought (or public opinion). Apparently, actions are not exactly aimed at winning over the public, but creating an opposition to it. The question here is whether this reflects a conscious strategy that ultimately strengthens the movement and leads to growth, or whether it is just a side-effect of identity politics by drawing boundaries between itself and the rest of society,
thus ultimately constructing an additional ‘opponent’ – the mainstream. The third function of international days of actions is to show mutual moral support to like-minded groups in other countries.

Do these actions target the pillars which support BE’s declared targets of state, nation and capital? At least for the limited orbit of influence on the directly involved participants of its events, activities and actions and its socio-cultural environments, it could be assumed that the actions contribute to questioning the legitimacy of and justification for the EU, its institutions and policies. BE targets in a limited and unsystematic way one pillar supporting the current structure of the EU and the nation-states: social legitimacy and acceptance. However, since the founding of the platform the focus has drastically shifted from the economic disfunctions of the EU to its refugee and border policies, as well as fighting against far-right groups.

With regards to BE’s stated goals, namely what it wants to achieve with its platform, its members claim wanting to

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overcome the national limits of social struggles, to work towards building transnational movements which relate to each other within and across national borders, and finally to develop a capacity for disruption of the public debate at ‘the level of ideas’ (BE 2013).

The strategy of BE is to create opportunities to meet, discuss, exchange, and make plans, to stay in contact in-between meetings and events, to develop the skills and obtain access to the knowledge necessary to coordinate effective long-term organising and resistance at the European level (ibid.). Yet this is just the declared aspiration. However, as their priorities change, it seems to effectiveness and success of the ESJM exist due to a combination of three key factors. The patterns of both reveal distinct aspects of the top-down view of power and this internalised notion translates into specific ways of dealing with power of that nature, thus supporting hypothesis number one that a top-down view of power is reflected in an approach to social change aiming at convincing or replacing those in power. However, there seems to be a contradiction between rhetoric and action, and between analysis and strategy, as anticipated by the third hypothesis, that movements appear to have ambivalent notions of power, drawing on both top-down and bottom-up views.

To sum up, while AS wants to ‘exert all its weight on the EU policies’ (AS 2012) by replacing those in positions of decision-making in order to reverse austerity politics and establish a ‘genuine democracy’ (ibid.), BE wants to withdraw consent and cooperation from nation, state and capital. Both theoretically reveal a certain understanding of a bottom-up view of power, however, when it comes to practice AS relies more on the top-down concept, while BE puts more emphasis on identity politics against the mainstream.

Concluding my assessment based on the analytical categories described and used above, internal obstacles
While on the theoretical level both seem to have a notion more closely related to the bottom-up view of power, on the practical level the picture looks different. Finally, the analysis of both cases has additionally shown that both networks lack a precise, coherent, offensive plan of action. This lack of strategy and the top-down view of power in the final instance lead to approaches to social change that are not effective in actually challenging the status quo.

**Conclusion**

Two contrasting views of power according to NVA literature were used to analyse the aspirations and actions of two activist networks, AS and BE, that represent two currents within the broader ESJM. While the first represents trade unions, NGOs and supporters of left-wing parties, the latter represents more radical, grassroots activists. While both rhetorically adhere to the bottom-up view of power, as they want to achieve change by mass social movements, their actual approaches reveal different aspects of the top-down view of power. This contradiction between analysis and action might be an obstacle to success. Accordingly, the findings in the above analysis tend to support the third hypothesis, claiming the prevalence of a hybrid notion among activists of the ESJM, containing aspects of both the top-down and the bottom-up views of power.

Despite the diagnosed democratic deficit of the European Union that requires techniques of struggle that go beyond institutionalised decision-making, due to the type of organisation of its members, AS continues to prefer conventional politics. Although BE acknowledges this necessity, its lack of continuity and strategic coherence stands in the way of building up a mass movement. The need for an offensive long-term strategic plan is a crucial point that applies to both cases.

This analysis illustrates how NVA concepts can be helpful for analysing the strategies and assessing the effectiveness of social movements. The top-down view of power is apparently widespread even among activists. Moreover, it shows how underlying, implicit and perhaps unconscious notions of the logic of power in society influence strategy for social change and thus emphasises the importance of explicitly dealing with the way power and social change work as an essential pre-condition to effective strategising. If European social movements are to be successful in their goal regarding social justice and a more inclusive, genuinely democratic and fair Europe, their organisers need to develop offensive strategies that target the social roots of political and economic power in this continent.

Further research using comprehensive surveys could assess the internalised notions of activists and leaders of social movements regarding power and social change with the help of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to verify the suggestions made here concerning their importance for the alignment and effectiveness of strategy in times of declining impact of conventional politics. Moreover, other concepts from NVA theory could be assessed by future research with regards to the ESJM, including the role of an escalating strategy, or the stance towards violence and maintaining nonviolent discipline.

This paper has demonstrated that the concepts of strategic nonviolent conflict are of relevance to evaluating the role of social movements beyond the field of peace and democracy studies. The logic of power is a social phenomenon of practical relevance not only for scholars of political theories but part of the foundation on which everyday resistance is based.

**References**


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Shopping Just Because

The woman in the too-tight business suit and sleek black frames has just done the sales.

At the traffic lights a rumble of log-trucks, delivery vans, four-wheel drives gust past, grit her eyes. She frowns, clutches her jumbo plastic bags against the pressure of wanting to be somewhere else, someone else without the need for all these things keeping her kerbed, her lunch hours on a leash, pulling her into a future so hectic where desire is push-buttoned, remote-controlled, flat-screened and the past is an endless pile of discarded, disposable, unfixable things, yesterday's promise of a better life, guaranteed not to last.

Anne Collins, Hobart, TAS

Author

Dalilah Anastasia Reuben-Shemia has a B.A. Social Sciences (Political Science, Sociology and Psychology) from Humboldt University in her hometown Berlin, Germany. She then undertook postgraduate studies in Kassel, Germany and at Rutgers University, USA. She has lived and spent time working, studying and researching in Greece, Spain, the USA and Latin America. As an activist and trainer she has been involved in labour and community organising, degrowth issues and social justice movements in Europe.
Attention to listening is often eschewed in favour of the more academically popular concept of voice. But, much like the ill-fated tree in the forest, what good is voice if there's no-one to listen? The Politics of Listening shifts attention away from voice and towards the less-explored concept of listening. In exploration of the micropolitics of listening, Leah Bassel investigates whose voices are silenced or ignored, and questions the political attitudes and environments that allow this.

In this short yet illuminating book, Bassel builds on the work of influential authors, most notably Susan Bickford and Nick Couldry, to ground the abstract concept of listening through topical case studies. The book provides a whirlwind introduction to exploring how the politics of listening impacts who and what is given an audience in the public sphere. Exploring examples from Canada, France, and the United Kingdom, Bassel's focus is on those whose voices are politically excluded by being silenced, ignored, or confined by narrow stereotypes, particularly migrants, indigenous people, and other marginalised communities.

The book explores several cases that illustrate how a micropolitics of listening can identify 'Us' versus 'Them' dichotomies in media and political representation. Bassel discusses the challenges of representation that face some marginalised groups. The first case study that Bassel explores is the struggles of minority women, most visibly Muslim women, to speak outside of the audible positions of "victim" or "entrepreneur". Tellingly, the title of that particular chapter is a quote from an interview: "They only listen when we bash our culture". This case study is an excellent introduction to the concept of political listening, as it clearly demonstrates how the voices of these women are either pigeon-holed or completely ignored.

The second case explores two examples when young, racialised men have acted out against the state in an effort to be politically heard. Bassel discusses both the Tottenham riots in the UK, and the suburban unrest in France in 2005. In both instances, class and race barriers were used to silence the political voices of those involved, reducing the space for listening. Participants were portrayed as apolitical and 'criminals', with then Minister of the Interior, Nicholas Sarkozy, going so far as to refer to them as 'racaille' (scum). Bassel suggests that events like these stem from a lack of intersectional listening and the difficulty in speaking outside of the us/them binary, particularly in an environment that leaves little room for discussions and different interpretations of such events.

The final cases turn to more uplifting examples of how groups and individuals are subverting the dominant political norms to carve out their own space in the public sphere. The first example continues the previous chapter's discussion about the Tottenham riots. This time, however, the focus is on how the community and the media came together to address the 'us' and 'them' dichotomies exposed throughout coverage of the riots. Following the divisive sensationalist coverage of the events, journalists met with local communities to discuss how media coverage could represent the area beyond the stereotypes of poverty and violence. Local journalism emerged as a way of contributing to media coverage that is sensitive to the socio-political context and grounded in community relationships. This type of reporting stands in stark contrast to the reporters who were 'parachuted in' to cover the riots. Citizen journalism was also explored as a way for local residents to enact equality through self-expression. Bassel explains that, 'In a critical but productive way, participants sought to make sense together actively and recast meaning, outside of binaries, and to demand change' (2017: 57). Listening is framed as an act of solidarity and as a way of changing the way we speak.

The Politics of Listening provides a useful starting point for further explorations of the micropolitics of listening. The case studies discussed make for interesting reading and provide an accessible entry to deeper discussions on the micropolitics of listening. Critically reflecting on whose voices are prominent in the public sphere is a valuable exercise in the modern media environment, and The Politics of Listening offers a guide on how we might begin to do this.

Author: Bridget Backhaus, Loughborough University.

Cartoon by Martin ‘Woody’ Robinson ©
Book Reviews


John Green’s novel Born to Run is styled as a political thriller with a very contemporary theme. It concerns a run at the White House by a female candidate – a Republican in this case – who is blindsided by a series of events that threaten to destroy her credibility and derail the campaign. Green’s protagonist – Isabel Diaz – has the Party’s nomination and is charging towards the finish line when the story opens. The presidential nominee is well-crafted as a highly intelligent super-achiever caught in complex family circumstances with a dark secret from her childhood that she desperately seeks to hide. The threats to her campaign include a rogue supporter redirecting campaign funds and a bizarre terror plot engineered by a group of ninja-like assassins operating in a high-tech shadow world.

The promotional material for the book describes the author’s ‘seemingly unimaginable yet believable scenarios across political, technological and financial terrains’ and the book comes with some major endorsements. P. J. O’Rourke describes it as a ‘spectacular’ thriller that kept him up at night. Jennifer Byrne reportedly said, ‘great fun… I really enjoyed it’. Green has potential. His writing style is direct and clear. He has an eye for character, and he can sustain a central plot and interweave a set of subplots. Readers may enjoy the intrigue, characterisation and fast pace.

But, contrary to the promotional blurbs, his story is just too far in the realm of the ‘unimaginable’ and unbelievable. The central plot is within the realms of possibility, particularly given the nature of the recent 2016 US Presidential election. Here we saw a mainstream female candidate with a strong chance of winning and a series of events from left field that looked like sabotage by powerful figures: the FBI Director’s announcement of an investigation into an email trail that vaguely related to Clinton, and the alleged hacking of Democratic Party emails by Russian agents. But John Green’s somewhat prescient version of these campaign spoilers in Born to Run is just too far-fetched, most notably in the terrorist plot to destroy London by triggering a computer-generated shockwave in the subway system. This doesn’t mean the book won’t find an audience: devotees of James Patterson or Lee Child would probably find it to their taste. But many writers successfully combine mystery and suspense with a powerful sense of believability for the discerning reader. John Grisham, Robert Goddard or Michael Connelly are examples of such successful combinations. Green’s work would benefit from more balance, and more respect for the reader’s intelligence.

Author: Tim Prenzler
Faculty of Arts, Business & Law
University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, AUS

Morning, all

The hangover slithers through your head and down to constrict your stomach which threatens dread rebellion — Bolshevik guts striking like cracked bells.

The grim thick smell of sausages doing a Dante on the grill attracts a frown of falling flies, saucing your misery with buzz.

Auld Lang fucking Syne smouldering in strained memory of 12pm and Cheers!
And then it happens. Fat sausage dog somehow leaps on cocktail legs.

His tail wipes the grime from the air — an angel infused with speed, allegro.

Now he’s trailing a string of namesakes like a fatty brown bridal train.

Your head chimes sudden glee, as Lawson replaces Alighieri.
The new year tips its beery lid.
And yes, yes, that inevitable sun.

Ps Cottier,
Canberra, ACT.
First thing, Nicole takes the Clydesdale for a swim. Pickering plunges into the sea up to his belly, shaking his head when the salt spray hits his eyes. The rides on the esplanade haven’t started up yet. On the merry-go-round, the lean, plastic replicas of her horse hang unmoving and rigid.

Pickering heaves out of the water. Nicole holds his bridle in one hand, leaving the other free to skim his coat, cold and sleek from the ocean. In the corral, she blinks him.

Nicole hauls the tram out of the shed it’s housed in at night and onto the tracks that span the bridge. She leads Pickering to the front of the tram, hitches him up, and sets up the A-frame with the fare prices: six dollars for an adult for a ride across the bridge from Victor Harbour to Granite Island, four for a child. The times are always the same. She makes the run every half hour.

On her second trip, Nicole sees a young woman walking beside the tram tracks. She’s nineteen or twenty, Nicole reckons: maybe a year or two older than she. Dark hair brackets her face, and she wears a chenille fleece and pale blue, low-rise jeans with the knees stripped out. Nicole feels a tangled desire to both be her and be near her.

Just seconds before she saw the woman, a little boy riding the tram with her had asked about the bag strapped to Pickering’s rump. So when this moment of desire comes, Nicole is saying, ‘It catches the poo and we take it out at the end, so the pier doesn’t get dirty.’

The woman looks up at her from the side of the bridge, a puffy donut from a sideshow stall between her thumb and forefinger, her tongue out. The way she turns her head, Nicole is certain she’s heard. Nicole shuts her mouth, all sweaty now she’s been caught talking about horse shit. The woman looks back down at the donut.

Pickering trots slowly, his hooves slipping on the rubber between the tracks, wet from the rain. Nicole lets off the horn to distract herself. The sound echoes across the bay and she feels better.

The woman on the bridge falls behind.

The un-glamorousness of her situation strikes her, this lumbering horse and carriage, her own heavy mass up front. When she was a little girl, she’d always imagined that being singular meant being special, like Cinderella at the ball, the only one who could dance in glass slippers without breaking them. Nicole had longed to be that weightless.

These days, Nicole knows that to be different is to be exposed, belly-up, too heavy to flip over. She feels the need to be generous to the tourists, a weight that deadens her limbs. Still, she’ll always say ‘of course, of course’ to any requests, and try to smile with her eyes as well as her mouth to look sincere, so everything will go black for a second. She hates her small eyes, and the way the flesh of her full cheeks curve, hiding them. The kids at school used to tease her about it—called her a chink.

She knows the size of her body makes her a target. Even at primary school, she grew breasts much earlier than the rest of the kids. The first day she wore a bra, as her mum pulled in to pick her up, a boy ran his fingers around the seams, pinched the elastic, and snapped it back against her shoulders. Nicole flinched at the sting, which made the boy laugh. She ran from him, flung herself into her mum’s Toyota, and pressed her face into the backseat’s blue vinyl.

Her mum asked what was wrong. Nicole spoke into the fabric of the car seat, while her mum rubbed her ankle.

Her mum said, ‘I’m sorry, love. Just don’t listen to them.’ Nicole said nothing because she’d already heard them loud and clear. She felt her mum’s hand lift from her, and listened to her heart and onto the tracks that span the bridge—the dip of the suspension—fit the key and drive off, leaving her rolling in the back with the weight of her belly in front of her, thinking that her breasts would not be like her teeth; she wouldn’t be able to push them flat against the end of the bed at night.

Later, early on in high school, she was proud of her buck teeth. A boy told her she gave the best blow job he ever had, and she reckoned it was the teeth, the space they opened up in her mouth. The boy’s cock came out unexpectedly in a dark corner of the sports shed, amongst the hockey sticks porcupining from a galvanised iron bin. It reminded her of the horses—“all flabby and folded. She touched it the same way she touched worms, with a shiver. The boy’s cock came out unexpectedly in a dark corner of the sports shed, amongst the hockey sticks porcupining from a galvanised iron bin. It reminded her of the horses—all flabby and folded. She touched it the same way she touched worms, with a shiver. The boy’s cock came out unexpectedly in a dark corner of the sports shed, amongst the hockey sticks porcupining from a galvanised iron bin. It reminded her of the horses—all flabby and folded. She touched it the same way she touched worms, with a shiver. The boy’s cock came out unexpectedly in a dark corner of the sports shed, amongst the hockey sticks porcupining from a galvanised iron bin. It reminded her of the horses—all flabby and folded. She touched it the same way she touched worms, with a shiver. The boy’s cock came out unexpectedly in a dark corner of the sports shed, amongst the hockey sticks porcupining from a galvanised iron bin. It reminded her of the horses—all flabby and folded. She touched it the same way she touched worms, with a shiver. The boy’s cock came out unexpectedly in a dark corner of the sports shed, amongst the hockey sticks porcupining from a galvanised iron bin. It reminded her of the horses—all flabby and folded. She touched it the same way she touched worms, with a shiver. The boy closed his eyes and made noises as if in his sleep.

But he must have talked, ‘cause afterwards Nicole got a reputation. Other boys called out as she crossed the oval, and stood too close in the assembly line, pressing the length of their thighs and arms against hers. Their attention exhausted her. She hacked off her hair, and stopped paying attention. She found that once she’d orientated away from them, she preferred looking at girls. She didn’t know what to do with this knowledge. After a while, the boys didn’t yell any more but whispered to each other, laughing, only her name audible to her. She spent her lunchtimes picking at the grass instead of eating, then binged on Iced Vovos when she got home, ravenous.

After the Ferris wheel starts its slow rotations—most of the carriages, fringed by plastic flags, still empty and light enough to swing in the wind—one of the kids, flung herself into her mum’s Toyota, and pressed her face into the backseat’s blue vinyl.

‘Hi.’ Nicole’s still in her friendly mode, expecting a customer—too late for today, but tomorrow from ten-thirty—her
view blocked by Pickering's body. Silence for a moment. She
comes round the horse to the fence and sees her, the same
woman from the bridge. Nicole feels a bolt of heat jolt through
her. She hates it when she gets this way. The woman stoops
to look through the wooden palings that hem the stable.

'I think I saw you on the bridge,' Nicole says. 'Just visiting?'

The woman nods. 'For a wedding,' she says. 'My aunt's.'

'Lotta people come here for weddings,' Nicole says.

'Can I touch her? She's gorgeous,' the woman says,
pointing to the Clydesdale.

'Hi. He bites.'

She pulls his hand away. 'Not you, but,' the woman says,
and gives her a half grin.

'Nope.' Nicole laughs too loudly. Embarrassed, she turns
away to brush Pickering, aware of the size, the shape, of her
arse in her jeans, the fluoro rain jacket elastic running over the
middle of it, her cheeks sagging underneath.

Nicole looks over her shoulder and catches the woman's
eye, the wedge of her face between the palings, her eyebrow
running almost to her nose. She's smiling.

'What are you doing now?' the woman says.

Nicole gestures to the horse, the brush in her hand.

'After?'

'Ride him back to the farm.'

'Wanna have a drink before you go?'

Nicole feels her old suspicion flare up, but she wants this
badly enough to say, 'Sure.' She pulls herself over the stable
gate, not bothering to open it, showing off. On the other side,
she says, 'I can only stay for half an hour. 'Cause of him.' She
points to Pickering, his face turned side on and curved like the
outside of a bottle.

'I'm Bec,' the woman says.

'Nicole.'

They walk to the pub at the end of the main drag, with meals
and arrows pointing to the pokies chalked up on the walls. The
smell inside is living and ripe.

She nods at Kestrel behind the bar, orders Coopers for
them both. Bec sucks hers down, half in one go.

'You do the thing with the horses every day? It's pretty
cool,' Bec says.

'Is it? Dunno. I do weekdays, Mum weekends.'

Nicole took over most of the shifts when she finished Year
12, after her mum woke up in the middle of the night unable
to breathe, certain she was dying. Her mum wanted to get out
of the business, which they'd owned since before Nicole was
born, but the government had already sunk too much money
into restoring the tram as a way of pulling in tourists to the town.

'Nice,' Bec says. 'I'd like to work around animals.'

Nicole's mum texts her: where r u?

'I gotta go,' Nicole says, guilt blanketing her mind for a
moment.

'Now?' Bec keeps her voice calm, but Nicole hears a hint
of disappointment under it.

The beer stills Nicole: she doesn't want to get up. She texts:
With a friend. Ride Pickering home 18er

Her mum texts back: ok.

Nicole can tell her mum's pissed, but, fuck it, she's never
done it before. She'll tell her mum she met an old friend, who
just rocked up and was leaving the next day.

Kestrel puts out a napkin with a bowl of peanuts. Bec feeds
them into her mouth in handfuls, her head tipped back. Her
hair sweeps past her shoulders, which are curved like she
does weights. Nicole wants to do something with Bec, maybe
show her something.

'The penguins will be out,' she says.

Bec skids across the wet rubber on the pier on the worn-out
rubber of her shoes, taking a run-up and sliding along. Nicole
balances on the tram rail. In the half-light, she can see the tide
tugging at the jetty, a litter of seaweed caught up in the eddies.
Her hands are cold. She blows on the tips of her fingers.

At the shoreline, they hear the penguins chattering amongst
the rocks.

'They kind of beep,' Bec says.

The granite, blossoming with orange lichen, hovers in the
dark.

'Maybe there's some under these rocks.' Nicole crouches
to look. Bec bends down next to her, peering into the shadow
of the boulder. Their shoulders touch. Nicole has a feeling of
everything sliding away from her except her own body, which
is intensely present and churning.

'Are there seals?' Bec asks.

'Maybe on the ocean side of the island. Sometimes boys
got down at night and throw tinnies at 'em. Dickheads.' She
probably went to school with most them.

On the other side, the wind hits. A wave connects with the
rock, splattering upwards and across the boulders. A shape
skitters out in front of them. Bec sets her mobile—a brick
Nokia—to torch and they see the humped back of a penguin.
She crouches next to it, and the light holds it paralysed for a
moment. It slips away into the grass and they realise there's
more of them, slipping away from the light and beeping. The
whole bank moves with their bodies. Bec turns off the light.
They can hear the penguins sliding through the grass, a
whispering sound underneath the waves.
They climb down the path cut into the island. The penguins avoid the pathways.

A man laughs from the rocks underneath them. Nicole thinks about the boys down there on the bouldered shoreline, drinking and falling.

She sits on a rock cracked in half and flattened by some ancient force, the fissures radiating out. The wet seeps into her bum and thighs. She hugs herself. Bec crouches down next to her and wraps her arm around Nicole. Nicole leans her head on Bec’s shoulder. Bec bends down to kiss her cheek. Nicole puts her face up to kiss her mouth. Bec’s cheeks are cold, and the warmth of her tongue is a surprise, its wetness. Nicole shuts her eyes, her body tingling.

‘You ok?’ Bec asks.

Nicole doesn’t open her eyes, speaks into the closeness between them. ‘Yeah. Just not used to this.’ But there’s an easiness to it too, once she feels beneath her fear.

‘You’re beautiful,’ Bec says.

Nicole opens her eyes, sees the outline of Bec’s face, dissolving at the edges in the dark. ‘So are you.’

The wind slides over their bodies and Nicole feels the warmth where they touch, and the chill of outer arm and leg. They kiss for ages and Nicole feels a longing to let go, to scratch warmth where they touch, and the chill of outer arm and leg.

‘Wanna lie down for a bit?’ Bec asks. Nicole nods. She can hear her own breathing.

They stretch their bodies along the globed succulents tangled between the rocks. Bec cuddles into her. Nicole can feel her heart and her breath, yeasty with beer.

Bec fumbles with the zip on Nicole’s jeans. Nicole lets her for a while, then reaches down and opens it up for her. Nicole’s body shakes—the cold and something else. She feels the warmth and wetness of Beck’s tongue and lips between her legs, and is surprised by the softness and intensity of the feeling. Nicole comes in hard little shivers.

‘Youse got a jacket?’ He doesn’t look at them when he asks, his arms, raised up, triumphant, holding something. ‘What ya gonna do now?’ he calls. She reckons he has the bloke’s clothes.

In the distance, another boy hollers. She can make out his arms, raised up, triumphant, holding something. ‘What ya gonna do now?’ he calls. She reckons he has the bloke’s clothes.

The naked one snorts, moving nearer to them. Up close, in the phone’s glow, Nicole recognises him from school, same year as her, and a jolt runs through her. He’s one of the boys from school camp who made iron-on transfers from photoshopped images of her taken at the last sports carnival, with a Sumo wrestler’s face on top of her body. They wore the shirts down to breakfast and, after cornflakes, the teachers took the boys away and gave them old uniforms to wear instead—the sleeves cut off because they’d been used over shirts in art class.

Bec shifts and Nicole puts out a hand, but the boy’s already heard. He holds his phone up to them, trying to make them out in the dark. Nicole sees only the dim glow of the screen, the rest of him eclipsed.

‘Jesus,’ he says. ‘I’m wasted.’

Bec laughs.

‘Youse girls.’ His voice is slurred. Nicole wonders what else he has to say, if he recognises her too, but the words seem gone from him. He turns away, calls out again to the others, but gets no reply.

He turns back. ‘What youse girls doing out here? Wanna kiss for me, warm me up?’

Nicole’s anger flares up. She’s not a bloody side show. She says to Bec, ‘Let’s go.’

Nicole can hear his teeth chattering.

‘Youse got a jacket?’ He doesn’t look at them when he asks, but away into the dark and the ocean beyond.

‘Give him yours, Nic?’

Nicole feels like she’s immersed in thick soup, all clogged up and clumpy. She knows she should help him—Bec wants her to—but her anger is wider, more able to grasp the air. He’s asking her for help? Bec puts a hand on hers, and Nicole feels the tips of her fingers at the creases of her knuckle joints. She doesn’t know what to do with this anger, lets it slam down, hauls herself up from the grass towards him. She puts her hands, flat, against his shoulders, surprised for a moment he lets her get this close. She shoves him—not much, she thinks—but he’s down.

Bec cries out, ‘Jesus,’ and retreats.

Nicole looks down at the bloke, on the ground and swearing. She turns away from him, fast, her body shaking, certain he’s going to follow her, and hurries after Bec. She doesn’t want her running around in the dark with these men, wants her safe off the island. Nicole feels buzzed, more full of energy than she’s been in a long time.

She catches up to Bec and cradles her elbow. ‘C’mon, I don’t want those others to see us.’

‘Why’d you do that?’ Bec sounds spooked and it pulls Nicole down a bit.

‘I know him,’ she says.
'He didn't do anything.'

'You won't get it.'

'Will he be ok?' Bec looks back behind her.

'I don't give a shit.' But the anger is leaving her. 'He'll be fine. And I didn't want him to hurt you—I know him, he would. We just needa leave, aye.'

Bec lets her hold her all the way back and Nicole feels like she's stumbled into some new way of being. She feels proud to walk Bec right up to her hotel door, with the carpeted reception and the glowing lights dimmed for the sleeping guests. Nicole watches her swipe the keycard and open up, the warm air from the heated inside brushing over her front. Bec shuts the glass door and the reflection from the street lights cut out Nicole's vision of her walking up the stairs.

She stands in the street with her fingertips tingling. She forgot to ask for her number. She thinks of calling out but stops herself. Bec didn't ask for hers either.

She rides Pickering home in the darkness, feeling the slide of muscles underneath her and the coldness at her edges where her body doesn't share heat with him.

She spends the next day looking out for Bec on the bridge, but recognises no one in the movement of people alongside the tram tracks, the slow clopping of the blinkered horse pulling her in the opposite direction from them.

The victory of last night, pushing that boy down, seems hollow. Stupid—she scared Bec. No wonder she didn't want her number. She keeps her spine curled and her hands in her pockets.

In the late afternoon sunlight, a photographer leads a wedding party across the bridge. Nicole is packing up, watching the bride hold her dress off the ground and roll her ankles around in heels she's clearly not used to wearing. She almost doesn't recognise Bec in her salmon-silk bridesmaid dress, her wild hair all separated out and stacked on her head. Nicole pulls back into the stable, putting her hand out to Pickering who's startled by her sudden movement. She thinks she should just go home, but instead stands there and slides her hand up and down Pickering's neck. He works his snout up under her armpit and flicks her arm up. He wants a swim.

She leads him across to the strip of beach. At the water's edge, she leans on him to take off her shoes. Above her, the wedding party has made it to the other side of the bridge and the photographer directs the bride and groom to the top of a granite boulder. Bec stands at the bottom of the rock with the other bridesmaids, watching the bride take off her heels and scramble up. Nicole pushes down the desire to run and lets the waves reach her toes, the freezing water clubbing her feet.

The bride reaches the top of the rock and Bec turns to the shore, shading her eyes against the setting sun, looking right at her. Pickering shivers his flank. Bec raises her hand, fingers cupped, and waves. Nicole waves back. The photographer calls the bridesmaids, gesturing up, and they stoop to take off their shoes. Bec bends down and Nicole thinks, this will have to be enough for now.

In Repose

The red dust town, rich on pearls and salt air covered them in dirt untouched by snow.

They chose to die here.

They made ancestors of their own in a graveyard of confused burial rites under land flat-packed with age,

their dates marked the length between the rising and the setting of one Japanese sun.

It was not that war that buried them.

Perhaps they'd once doubted if they should throw it all into the wind for a kind of blue they couldn't translate,

but they can't tell us now which intentions led their stone to rest in this place where found families sleep side by side.

Claire Rosslyn Wilson,
Barcelona, Catalonia/Windsor, VIC

Author
Dr Ariella Van Luyn is a lecturer in writing at the University of New England, Armidale. She is the author of a novel, Treading Air, and several short stories published in Overland, Southerly and elsewhere. Her research interests include historical fiction, women's stories, community narratives, regional creativity and practice-led research.
**I Q**

for ten thousand years
if you asked
*how is a rabbit related to a dog*
there would have been just one answer

dogs chase rabbits

but for the psychometrists eugenicists like
mr burt mr spearman mr binet
that wasn’t intelligence
the only answer *Science* allowed
the only answer they allowed was
both are mammals

no

if you have any creativity
dr burt dr spearman dr binet
tell me ten ways
a rabbit is related to a dog

you can’t you can’t even begin

so here are some

both are feral pests in australia

both are restricted to colours
black grey brown russet or white

they supply metaphoric verbs –
to dog a person’s footsteps
to rabbit on

they have acute hearing

children keep them as pets

they are names of football teams

they are years in chinese astrology

they dig up gardens

they are animals
traditionally used in scientific experiments

and if you have any precision of thought
professor burt professor spearman professor binet
tell me
what is the one thing
that *only* dogs and rabbits
have in common

you can’t you have no idea
so here is my answer

they are the only animals
whose nursery names are formed
by putting the name of the young
before of the name of the adult

but
you are not even puppy dogs or bunny rabbits
are you

cyril burt charles spearman alfred binet

---

_Ron Heard,
Brisbane QLD_
Talking Back to Dianne Arbus

Artworks by Donna McDonald

Untitled, 1971 by American photographer, Diane Arbus, is an anthology of photos taken in ‘an institution for the mentally retarded’ (the term used at the time). In my drawing-as-research project, ‘Talking back to Diane Arbus’, I challenge the photographic ethics of Arbus’s disturbing, confronting and occasionally dehumanising portrayal of her subjects.

Arbus’s photographs raise ethical concerns about her access to these people as well as her portrayal of them. None are given names. Most look dazed. Many are masked. Some are costumed. Few are smiling. In my mixed-media drawings, I aimed to restore the dignity and humanity of these long-ago secluded people by reprising Arbus’s images in an act of memorialising them within the contemporary context of my workplace.

I used a black pen to trace images from three Diane Arbus photos onto fragments of transparent paper, which I then glued onto crayoned photos of scenes from my workplace: a colleague typing, a seat bench, and bookshelves with a floral cup in my office. In another image, I printed a torn copy of a photo with red ink and rubbed it with charcoal and chalk to create an aged effect.

I edged each image with words from an Alden Nowlan poem, ‘He sits on the floor of a school for the retarded’. In doing so, I aimed to signify not only the essence of my work life, i.e. working with and for people with disability, but also to humanise the confronting Arbus photos. These revised images provide a new narrative for Arbus’s photographic subjects, and evoke fresh ways of regarding historic images of people with intellectual disability.

She hugs me now, this retarded woman, and I hug her.

We are brother and sister, father and daughter, mother and son, husband and wife.

We are lovers. We are two human beings huddled together for a little while by the fire in the Ice Age, two hundred thousand years ago.
2. Sad-faced girls in park: Arbus revisited

I sit down on the floor of a school for the retarded,
As a writer of magazine articles accompanying a band
that was met at the door by a child in a man’s body
who asked them, ‘Are you the surprise they promised us?’

... It’s nine o’clock in the morning, not an hour for music.
And at the best of times, I’m uncomfortable
in situations where I’m ignorant
of the accepted etiquette: it’s one thing
to jump a fence, quite another thing to blunder
into one in the dark.
... the young woman who sits down beside me and, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, rests her head upon my shoulder.

It's nine o'clock in the morning, not an hour for music.
I sit down on the floor of a school for the retarded …
and I don't know what to do …
about the young woman who
sits down beside me and, as if it were the most natural
thing in the world, rests her head on my shoulder …

‘Hold me,’ she whispers. ‘Hold me.’
I put my arm round her. ‘Hold me tighter.’
I do, and she snuggles closer …

It's what we all want in the end,
to be held, merely to be held…

4. Lonely Girl: Arbus revisited
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