Performing Disemployment: Disability, Theatre, and Work in the United States since the 1970s

By

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Patrick McKelvey was born in Westerville, Ohio on July 6, 1986. In 2008, he graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Texas at Austin with dual B.A.s in English and in Theatre and Dance. At UT, he twice received Presidential Scholarships as well as a Rapoport-King Thesis Scholarship. Additionally, he was named a Dean's Distinguished Graduate, and received Honorable Mention for Best Undergraduate Honors Thesis in the Department of English for "Twenty-first Century Boys, or, Boys Gone Wilde: Musical Dramaturgies of Queer Affect" (co-advised by Ann Cvetkovich and Stacy Wolf).

Following graduation, Patrick worked for two years in dramaturgy and literary management, first as a Literary Assistant at McCarter Theatre in Princeton, NJ, and then as a freelancer in New York. He enrolled in the PhD program in Theatre and Performance Studies at Brown University in 2010, where he eventually joined the Open Graduate Education program, through which he studied anthropology. While at Brown, Patrick taught undergraduate courses including Persuasive Communications and Senior Seminar, as well as a graduate theatre history seminar to MFA actors at Brown/Trinity.

Patrick's research on disability performance has received a number of accolades, including the Wise-Susman Award for Best Graduate Student Paper from the American Studies Association (2015) and the Best Graduate Student Paper Prize from ATHE's Theory and Criticism Focus Group (2014). "Ron Whyte's Disemployment: Prosthetic Performance and Theatrical Labor," an article based upon Chapter One of this dissertation, is forthcoming in *Theatre Survey* in September 2016. His archival research at the Beinecke Rare

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Upon completion of the dissertation, Patrick began an appointment as Visiting Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies at Florida State University.

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My parents, Nora and Tim McKelvey, don't know quite what to make of having a performance theorist as a son, but their encouragement of my reading and writing from my earliest days made a life of writing and thinking and reading possible. And in quite literal ways, their material support – when a computer died the same week my dissertation proposal was approved – allowed this dissertation to be written.

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INTRODUCTION

A History and Theory of Disemployment

In 2004, the socialist magazine *The Monthly Review* printed a polemic that demanded a transformation within disability consciousness, the administration of the welfare state, and the organization and practice of work.[1] The article, written by disabled visual artist Sunny Taylor, redirects prevailing political currents within dominant U.S. American discourses of disability. Whereas many of her contemporaries championed disabled Americans' right to economic opportunity through waged labor, Taylor introduced an alternative horizon for disability politics: "The Right Not to Work." This right, she clarified, "is the right not to have your value determined by your productivity as a worker, by your employability or salary."[2] As Taylor elaborates it, the right not to work includes both a normative political component—the decoupling of access to financial security from individual labor-power—and a "material shift," in which readers "cultivat[e] a skeptical attitude regarding the significance of work, which should not be taken at face value as a sign of equality and

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[1] Sunny Taylor, "The Right Not To Work: Power and Disability." *Monthly Review* 55.10 (2004): 30-44.

[2] Ibid., 40. In the pages that follow, I neither strictly adhere to nor totally abandon conventional distinctions between the categories of work and labor. The narrower category of work is usually intended to signify the activity of waged labor, whereas the broader category of labor, in Marxist lines of analysis, describes "a collective and creative human capacity harnessed by capital to the production of surplus value." In general, my writing reflects this distinction, but I sometimes use these terms interchangeably because of linguistic challenges presented by a disability studies perspective and because of the unclear status of the wage relation in many of the practices I discuss. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 14.

enfranchisement, but should be analyzed more critically."[3] Such analysis might temper what Taylor describes as enduring "non-working guilt" within disability communities, even within prominent activist organizations such as ADAPT (Americans Disabled for Attendant Personal-care Today, formerly Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transportation Today).[4] Taylor stops short of prescribing in advance the mechanisms for practices of wealth distribution that might accompany such a political and material change. She does not, for instance, make a recommendation for the implementation of a universal basic income. But her argument for the right not to work calls into question the supposed moral superiority of "earned" income and reimagines welfare consumption as neither stigmatizing nor impoverishing.

Taylor foregrounds disabled people as the proper inheritors of the right not to work, but as the article concludes, she expands her conception of this new right. Disabled people's experiences of economic violence within capitalist economies are not exceptional, she argues. Rather, they are extensions and intensifications of the exploitation of "the able-bodied who have no other choice but to participate."[5] Taylor connects her critique of the valorization of work within disability activist communities to a broader indictment of a socioeconomic system predicated upon compulsory labor. In so doing, Taylor's right not to work anticipates Kathi Weeks' theorization of "antiwork politics" as activity that "challeng[es] the present organization of work" by "confront[ing] its reification and

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[3] Taylor, 40.

[4] Ibid., 30.

[5] Ibid., 43.

depoliticization [as well as] its normativity and moralization."[6] "The right not to work," Taylor informs her readers, "is an ideal worthy of the impaired and the able-bodied alike."[7]

Taylor and Weeks articulate political projects mutually committed to restricting the role of work in organizing social life while also enabling "creativity." Their understandings of creativity differ, however. For Weeks, the goal of antiwork politics is "to remind us that it is also possible to be creative outside the boundaries of work."[8] This suggests a desire, in part, to rescue "creativity" from its proliferation within neoliberal economies to describe both the content and class status of workers such as "architects, entertainers, artists, and opinion makers [who] are increasingly recognized to be central to the economic vitality of modern cities."[9] And with good reason! The expansion of creative industries in the late twentieth century in and through the ascendance of affective and immaterial labor – or as Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt argue, the "political rebranding of the cultural industries" – has further eroded the distinction between working and nonworking life that prompts Weeks' commitment to curtailing work's reach.[10]

A concern with creativity suffuses Taylor's article, primarily with reference to the author's own practice as a visual artist. Taylor begins the article in the confessional mode:

> I have a confession to make: I do not work. I am on [Supplemental Security Income]. I have very little work value (if any), and I am a drain on our country's welfare system. I have another confession to make: I do not think this is wrong, and

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[6] Weeks, 11.

[7] Taylor, 43.

[8] Weeks, 12.

[9] Arlene Dávila, *Culture Works: Space, Value, and Mobility in the Neoliberal Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1.

[10] Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, "In the Social Factory?: Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25.7-8(2008): 1-30, at 2.

> to be honest, I am very happy not working. Instead I spend the majority of my time doing the activity I find the most rewarding and valuable, painting.[11]

Given both the prominence and elasticity of the category "creative workers" in contemporary discourse, Taylor's declaration that she, a painter, has "very little work value (if any)," and her insistent refusal to discuss her artistic practice in terms of work, might come as something of a surprise.[12] Taylor explains that she sells her work but "do[es] not support [her]self from these sales."[13] This claim serves both to bolster her point about her minimal work value and to introduce her contestation of the idea that the primary value of artistic practice lies in its potential to contribute toward her economic independence. The remainder of Taylor's article does not address artistic labor in any detail. She writes more frequently of affective, administrative, and industrial job functions – "waitress, secretary, factory worker, or bus driver" – that would require prohibitively expensive accommodations if disabled people such as herself were to occupy them, and thus, would fail "in a cost-benefit analysis."[14]

Taylor's call for the right not to work admirably refuses to reduce artistic practice to market instrumentality, but her writing does not adequately account for the relationship between artistic labor and the right not to work. To what extent does she understand arts work (or, as she argues, arts nonwork) as an exceptional form of labor, and to what end? One might be hard pressed to imagine a disabled waitress describing her service industry job as something other than work on the basis that she cannot survive on this compensation

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[11] Taylor, 30.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 39.

alone, and instead insist that we recognize her service labor for its value outside of market relations. Taylor's treatment of artistic work as fundamentally different from waitressing, bus driving, and hustling on the assembly line participates in a long history in which art has been regarded in contradistinction to work. Explaining the emergence of the art workers movement in the 1960s United States, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson suggests that

> what makes the coherence of the phrase *art worker* challenging – even oxymoronic – is that under capitalism art also functions as the "outside," or other to labor: a nonutilitarian, nonproductive activity against which mundane work is defined, a leisure-time pursuit of self-expression, or a utopian alternative to the deadening effects of capitalism.[15]

However ubiquitous and persistent, accounts of art as work's other are nevertheless surprising given that, as Bryan-Wilson notes, following Marx: "the artist is often *more* subject to the tastes of the market and its deadening effects than other wage laborers are."[16]

Radical transformations in the relationship between art and work in the United States since the 1970s have paralleled equally radical transformations in the relationship between disability and work. "Performing Disemployment" argues that these transformations were mutually constitutive. The disability rights movement, which witnessed pan-disability activism among different disability constituencies demanding civil rights – including the right to compete in the labor market – coincided with the ascension of commercialized affective and immaterial labor in which the figure of the actor has emerged as the paradigmatic worker. These developments also unfolded in tandem with the installation of a new political economic order, neoliberalism, that favors market rule as the arbiter of the political and

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[15] Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*: *Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 27.

[16] Ibid.

social good, and which has, in turn, accompanied the evisceration of an already compromised U.S. American welfare state.

In this context, the disabled arts worker, and especially the disabled actor, has proven remarkably protean, contributing to what might otherwise appear to be politically contradictory projects. Disability theatre and performance practices have become instruments for introducing disabled Americans into the labor market and for critiquing employment as the prevailing horizon of disability policy and activism. Whether providing opportunities for workforce participation, championing the right not to work, or hovering ambivalently between work and nonwork, theatrical performance emerged as the critical nexus between disability politics and the politics of work in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century United States.

I appropriate the term "disemployment" to describe the theatre and performance practices that have mediated disabled Americans' experiences with and access to work and welfare since the 1970s.[17] The "dis" of "disemployment" signifies doubly, functioning both as an abbreviation of "disability" and as a negating prefix. The conjunction of "dis" and "employment" describes theatre and performance practices with multiple, contradictory, and sometimes unpredictable political trajectories. Disemployment refers to theatrical performance practices that have come to usher disabled people into the workforce and those that have exposed the limits of employment as the prevailing goal of disability politics. I excavate a paradigm of disemployment within U.S. American history by examining a broad repertoire of disability performance, including experimental theatre, epistolary performance, political actions, activist ephemera, and arts festivals. In so doing, I reveal the parallel – and

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[17] In current usage, "disemployment" refers to the "absence or withdrawal of employment." disemˈployment, n.". *OED Online*. June 2016. Oxford University Press. *http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54206?redirectedFrom=disemployment*, accessed 12 June, 2016.

sometimes intersecting – trajectories of state agencies, disability activist organizations, and individual disabled artists who mobilized theatrical performance to reimagine the relationship between disability and work.

As a historical phenomenon and as a theoretical perspective, disemployment requires that we pursue a number of different avenues. I begin by introducing what I call a historical-administrative model of disability. I explain how this model responds to ongoing critiques of the social model of disability within disabilitiy studies, and demonstrate the utility of the historical-administrative model for scholarship at the intersections of disability studies and theatre and performance history. Next, I review both historical and theoretical scholarship on the relationship between disability and work, and connect these shifting relationships to expanding and intensifying anxiety about disability fraudulence in the context of the late twentieth century United States. Critical disability studies scholars, and queer and feminist disability theorists in particular, have recently recuperated popular anxieties about disability and inauthenticity. These recuperative measures have, in turn, spurred disability theorists to be critical of the valorization of work within disability history, culture, and politics.

Next, I provide a historical overview of the proliferation of efforts in the 1970s to put disabled Americans to work in the arts, especially theatre and performance. I discuss precursors to this phenomenon, such as state funding for the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in the 1960s, as well as collaborations among the National Endowment for the Arts and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the specter of disability in the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) New York Artists Project in 1978. Reviewing this historical trajectory not only illuminates a previously unrecognized shift towards employment through theatre and performance within U.S. American disability history, but it also demonstrates the extent to which work was a priority within disability politics and activism, an emphasis that is either ignored or regarded as so commonsensical so as to not warrant further attention. This shift to creating employment opportunities for disabled arts workers accompanied a broader transformation in the organization and practice of work. I turn to a theoretical archive from theatre and performance studies, sociology, and political theory that uses the figure of the actor to explain these transformations, emphasizing in particular lines of analysis that help explain how theatrical labor functions as both a form of work and a practice for critiquing work politics. By reading these emphases on acting and performance within disability history and transformations within work alongside one another, I argue not only that these developments are mutually constitutive, but that a disability perspective might further demonstrate how and why acting and performance achieve such explanatory purchase for divergent political projects in the history of U.S. American work. I conclude with brief overviews of the three body chapters.

The Historical-Administrative Model of Disability

"Performing Disemployment" addresses work as it intersects with disability politics, art, and activism. This thematic focus on the subject of work is part of a descriptive effort to document and theorize transformations within U.S. American histories of disability and of theatre and performance over the past half-century. But my emphasis on work also operates on a historiographic register with respect to disability. My engagement with disability as an administrative category for managing labor market participation offers what I call a *historical-administrative* model of disability. To clarify the contributions of a historical-administrative model of disability, allow me to provide an overview of how such a model both extends and departs from dominant theorizations of disability within critical disability studies.

Over the past fifty years, disability theorists and activists alike have argued that disability is socially constructed. Such accounts of disability vary considerably, but they are uniform in their rejection of "medical models" that reduce disability to an individual problem located within the body that requires intervention in the form of rehabilitation or cure. Chief among the critiques of the medical model is "the social model" that developed in Great Britain in the early 1970s.[18] The social model was first articulated by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation,

> a small, hardcore group of disabled people, inspired by Marxism, who rejected the liberal and reformist campaigns of more mainstream disability organisations…the aim of the UPIAS was to replace segregated facilities with opportunities for people with impairments to participate fully in society, to live independently, to undertake productive work, and to have full control over their own lives.[19]

Members of UPIAS and their political descendants do not locate disability as internal to the disabled person but identify it as a product of the social environment. In the decades following the emergence of UPIAS, "the social model" would become shorthand for a number of social constructionist accounts of disability.

The social model has proven effective in many regards, although its inadequacies have become increasingly apparent to scholars and activists alike. For disability theorist Tom Shakespeare, the social model has proven effective in forging political movements among disabled people, liberating disabled people through the removal of social barriers, and absolving disabled people of their feelings of self-blame for their oppression.[20] But for Shakespeare and others, the social model also has severe limitations that derive from its

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[18] Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability." In *The Disability Studies Reader*. Ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 214-221.

[19] Ibid., 214.

[20] Ibid., 217.

roots in the perspectives of white, male, heterosexual, wheelchair users. Feminist disability theorists have highlighted how the social model of disability discounts material experiences of disability and fails to serve disabled people with degenerative conditions and chronic illnesses, a constituency for whom medical intervention might be desirable.[21] Shakespeare, following Shelly Tremain, also highlights how the social model depends upon a false distinction between (bodily) impairment and (social) disability that fails to acknowledge how the body is no less historically contingent or socially mediated than the environments those bodies inhabit. [22] From Shakespeare's perspective, the social model is also compromised by its tautological thesis that suggests that distinguishing between disability and ability produces not difference, but oppression. [23]

Critical disability theorists have developed new models of disability in concert with the critiques of the social model of disability that Shakespeare identifies. The historical-administrative model enacted in "Performing Disemployment" shares many features with Deborah Stone's "political approach" to disability and Alison Kafer's "political/relational model of disability."[24] For Stone, the political approach "explore[s] the meaning of disability for the state–the formal institutions of government, and the intellectual justifications that give coherence to their activities."[25] Kafer's political/relational model emphasizes the inadequacy of the disability/impairment dyad, highlights the material experience of disability,

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[21] Ibid., 218-219.

[22] Ibid., 219.

[23] Ibid., 218.

[24] Deborah Stone, *The Disabled State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 3-4.; Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 4.

[25] Stone, 3-4.

and articulates a broader conception of disability politics that is irreducible to the elimination of social barriers.[26] The most distinguishing feature of the political/relational model is its refusal to dismiss medicine tout court, electing instead to critique what Kafer calls the "*curative imaginary*, an understanding of disability that not only *expects* and *assumes* intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention."[27]

"Performing Disemployment" is a historiographic project that develops a previously unrealized genealogy of U.S. American disability performance. As such, it requires not only a normative model of disability, such as Kafer's political/relational model that outlines which dimensions of disability ought to be considered when imagining and enacting a more just future for disabled people, but also a descriptive model that accounts for how disability has been understood, even as that understanding may not always serve projects of disability liberation and justice. The historical-administrative model of disability is perhaps most clearly imagined as a historically situated iteration of Kafer's political/relational model which, given the twentieth and twenty-first century context of the present inquiry, emphasizes disability as an administrative category that has regulated who is subject to compulsory competition in the labor market and who is granted a reprieve or is excluded from it altogether. The administrative category of disability has been contingent upon medical professionals conferring disability status, and thus, the historical-administrative model of disability, even more so than the political/relational model, incorporates some degree of medical authority, knowledge, and power that disability studies has long contested. Ellen Samuels, for example, critiques the "medico-administrative methods [used] to produce

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Kafer, 27.

knowledge about disability [and that] determine policy and resource allocation."[28] The historical-administrative model, however, recognizes the social mediation and historical contingency of all forms of medical knowledge and authority, including those that have helped construct "disability" as a meaningful social welfare category in the twentieth and twenty-first century United States.

One advantage of a historical-administrative approach to the study of disability pertains to scope: it hails a broader range of subjects than those that might otherwise enter the purview of disability performance scholarship, which tends to address either representations of disability in dominant (read: nondisabled) cultural forms or work by artists self-consciously participating in disability culture. The historical administrative model addresses subjects who have organized their disability identities, at least in part, in response federal disability policy, as in the case of the pan-disability activism that fomented among otherwise discrete disability constituencies in the wake of the passage of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, and the subsequent lack of enforcement of Section 504, this legislation's civil rights provision for disabled Americans. At the same, the historical-administrative model also incorporates people who consume disability welfare resources, such as recipients of SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) and SSI (Supplemental Security Income), but who may not have cultivated a cultural or political identity around their disability status. From the perspective of the historical-administrative model, these subjects, too, are agents both within U.S. American disability history and within the repertoire of U.S. American disability performance.

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[28] Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 124.

But the reach of the historical-administrative model is even broader than this. Many disability theorists highlight that ablebodiedness is temporary and that everyone lives in relation to disability identity. Save the event of premature death, these critics say, the question is not if, but when, one will acquire disability. The historical-administrative model is more modest in its scope, demonstrating disability's expansive reach within a particular historical period (in the present case, the twentieth and twenty-first century) and geopolitical context (the United States). But the question of scope is not its only distinguishing feature. The universalizing approach risks reducing disability status to the fact of impairment and erases questions of race, gender, and sexuality in understanding who is targeted for disablement (and when), and generalizes disability acquisition as a temporal question, a question of its inevitability on the horizon. The historical-administrative approach, by contrast, highlights how the social welfare category of disability organizes who must work and who might not, who can and who cannot refuse work, and how one must perform to and for the state in order to legitimate those refusals. From this perspective, anyone subject to American law in the twentieth and twenty-first century United States lives, works, and indeed acts relative to the administration of disability by the state. The question of how one exists in relation to disability is not a question of disability's eventuality, but rather its saturation of everyday (non)working life.

Disability: What's Work Got to Do With It?

Some disability theorists have written about the relationship between disability and work in ways that expose sociocultural commitments to ablebodiedness and compulsory labor within industrial capitalism and its aftermath. For example, crip theorist Robert McRuer has theorized "compulsory able-bodiedness" in part by drawing attention to emergent definitions of "ability" (and its cognates) under industrial capitalism to mean "being capable of normal physical exertions required in a particular of system of labor."[29] For McRuer, compulsory able-bodiedness describes life within a socioeconomic system in which subjects who have able bodies are free to "sell [their] labor but not free to do anything else," and in which disabled subjects do not even enjoy this modicum of freedom.[30] Other disability theorists have taken up the subject of work in order to shore up neoliberal discourses of diversity and inclusiveness. Feminist disability theorist Rosemarie Garland Thomson, writing earlier than McRuer, discusses the discursive and material threats that "physical disability" has posed to American commitments to "liberal individualism," before valorizing the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) for redirecting the goal of disability policy from the "restitution" of disability through income maintenance programs to the "accommodation" of disability in public life.[31] In concert with prevailing understandings of the social model of disability, Garland Thomson champions workplace environments that accommodate bodily difference, thereby granting disabled people "the privilege of laboring in a society that affirms work."[32]

McRuer and Garland Thomson confirm that disability is defined in terms of a subject's capacity for labor, but neither accounts for how this has come to be the case. The most robust account of the evolution of disability as a welfare category appears in the work of political theorist Deborah Stone, who examines in *The Disabled State* how disability has

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[29] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 8.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Literature and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 49, 47.

[32] Ibid., 51.

been asked “to resolve the issue of distributive justice.”[33] Why is it, Stone asks, that “disability as an administrative category in the welfare state . . . entitles its members to particular privileges in the form of social aid and exemptions from certain obligations of citizenship[?]”[34] Stone’s critique is not that the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship vary for different citizens, but that the category of disability had been miscast—that welfare states “are asking the concept of disability to perform a function it cannot possibly perform.”[35]

Stone traces the decoupling of disability from work in England, Germany, and the United States back to the fourteenth century predecessors of English Poor Law. [36] With the emergence of capitalism, feudal subjects became divorced from the land. Subsequently, legal apparatuses were instituted to control vagrancy and begging, to regulate who did and did not have the right to refuse work. The ability to travel was predicated upon “validating device[s] in the form of certification by local officials” that used the capacity to work “as the criterion by which people would be separated into the primary and secondary distributive systems.”[37] By the nineteenth century, Poor Law organized this “formerly undifferentiated mass of paupers” into distinct categories: “children, the sick, the insane, ‘defectives,’ and the ‘aged and infirm.’”[38] With the exception of children, each of these categories becomes subsumed

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[33] Stone,13.

[34] Ibid., 4.

[35] Ibid., 13.

[36] Ibid., 29-51.

[37] Ibid., 36.

[38] Ibid., 39-40.

by the category of disability.[39] These otherwise distinct conditions shared in common only "their reduction of people's ability to work" and their subsequent incorporation within a "common administrative mechanism."[40] Stone argues that English welfare policy ultimately evinced less an interest in distributing economic resources to the poor than it did in "prevent[ing] ablebodied workers from pursing their self-interest to the possible detriment of employers."[41]

While the administrative category of disability varied in its development and regulatory intentions in different welfare states, its primary concerns were consistently about work. In Germany, robust welfare resources had long been mobilized in the name of nation building and cultivating a citizenry that felt an allegiance to the state.[42] Here, the administration of disability status "preserved the occupational hierarchy and social status relationships by granting disability" benefits to subjects who, were they have changed careers in order to accommodate a newly acquired disability, would have experienced socioeconomic decline.[43] Stone's attention to the implementation of disability insurance in the United States focuses on the belatedness of its arrival, further evidence of the country's general delay in developing welfare mechanisms more broadly.[44] Whereas most Social Security entitlements were introduced in 1935, social insurance for disabled Americans was not introduced until

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[39] For an account of how adolescence itself became understood as disabling in the context of the late-twentieth century United States, see Julie Passanante Elman, *Chronic Youth* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

[40] Stone, 55.

[41] Ibid., 54.

[42] Ibid., 66.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 68.

1956, and eligibility criteria for this insurance did not resemble its present form (no age restrictions, not exclusive to "permanent" disability) until 1965.[45] The development of disability as an administrative category in the United States was remarkable in large part because of the controversy over "the *definition* of disability and the process of disability *certification*."[46] Physicians, authorized to pronounce disability status in the eyes of the state, largely believed that "medical science [was] incapable of determining whether people can or cannot work."[47] Some doctors even worried that "the very process of labeling a person as disabled would weaken his incentive to recover and rehabilitate himself, and that income awards on the basis of disability would only encourage malingering."[48]

Mid-century anxieties about malingering and disability fraudulence extended and intensified longstanding fears about fraudulence and the evasion or refusal of work under capitalism. "The connection between disability and deception," Stone writes, "meant that the very category of disability was developed to incorporate a mechanism for distinguishing the genuine from the artificial."[49] The introduction of systems of certification, including "letters" and "badges and branding," within the long march from the late fourteenth century to the formalization of the English Poor Laws in the nineteenth century, was to distinguish the "genuine" from the disingenuous, "legitimate beggars" from their illegitimate counterparts.[50] By the time Stone published *The Disabled State* in the early 1980s, the Reagan administration

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[45] Ibid., 78-79.

[46] Stone., 69. Emphasis original.

[47] Ibid., 80.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 32.

[50] Ibid., 36-7.

had “treat[ed] many disabled citizens as cheaters and subject[ed] them to much the same treatment as that given to AFDC mothers in the seventies.”[51] Such unwarranted anxieties about disability fraud and the accompanying economic and political injustices perpetuated against disabled Americans prompted Stone’s investigation regarding the role of disability in the formation of welfare states.

Widespread and longstanding associations of disability with duplicity intensified in the mid and late twentieth century United States, where such amplified anxieties were met with equally amplified efforts to regulate, verify, and obstruct claims to disability status. Indeed, the recognition that the desire to claim disability status might be contingent upon factors other than the impairment itself impeded the implementation of disability social insurance in the first place. It was feared, for example, that people, irrespective of disability status, would pursue disability claims more frequently in times of high unemployment. By the early 1980s, anxieties about disability fraudulence were spurred by the fact that “disability benefits [were] increasingly awarded for those disorders that are hardest to assess,” by which Stone means “mental as opposed to physical conditions.”[52]

State authorities adjudicated the legitimacy of subjects’ claims to disability status, and by extension, regulated their relationship to compulsory labor, through a number of (often overlapping) measures, including medical examinations, practices of certification and documentation, strict eligibility requirements, and the quality of cash benefits. Eligibility for disability benefits is also contingent on the condition that “an applicant . . . must be willing

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[51] Ibid., 12.

[52] Ibid., 9.

to accept rehabilitation and/or treatment of his disabling conditions."[53] Stone describes this condition as the "modern analogue of the workhouse test [in nineteenth century England]; it is intended to reveal the applicant's true motivations."[54] Furthermore, the quality of cash benefits from income maintenance programs guarantee that the quality of life obtainable through disability entitlements is inferior to that obtained through even low-wage labor. The structurally impoverishing effects of disability benefits are designed, in part, to prevent nondisabled Americans (the "undeserving" poor) from feigning disability as an alternative to waged labor. But as impoverishing as they were, income maintenance programs for disabled Americans still offered cash benefits that were superior to those distributed through other welfare programs, such as AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children, now Temporary Aid for Need Families, or TANF). As welfare historian Felicia Kornbluh notes, this had the effect of thwarting potential alliances among differing welfare constituencies.[55]

And then there is the matter of documentation. Ellen Samuels elaborates what she calls "*biocertification*," defined as "the massive proliferation of state-issued documents purporting to authenticate a person's biological membership in a regulated group," including identity categories of disability, gender, and race. It emerged "at the turn of the [twentieth] century and ha[s] become even more powerfully instituted" in the transition to the twenty-first.[56] Stone notes that the use of certification practices to legitimize certain subjects as

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[53] Stone., 125.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 8.

[56] Samuels, 9.

exempt from compulsory labor dates back to at least the fourteenth century.[57] But textual practices for certifying disability identity in the twentieth century United States proliferated in tandem with anxiety about the variability of applicants' representations of their disablement to physicians during the certification process. Biocertification, like these other mechanisms for adjudicating the legitimacy of one's claimed disability status, was wary of the possibility of infelicitous claimants, that the category of disability was particularly vulnerable to performance.

Recent scholarship in disability studies has responded to longstanding associations of disability and fraudulence not by suturing disability to authenticity, but by accounting for the ways that disabled people have developed sophisticated bodily practices that destabilize the bifurcation of real-fake in order to access resources within ableist political paradigms. Tobin Siebers provides a taxonomy of practices of "disability masquerade," many of which he valorizes on the basis that they "inflect private and public space, allowing expression of a public view of disability for political ends" or constitute "a form of communication, either between people sharing the same disability, or as a message to able-bodied people that a disabled person is in their midst."[58] For example, Siebers identifies the Capitol Crawl, a landmark (and still hotly contested) disability protest demanding the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as a masquerade for political purposes in which disability activists staged amplified versions of their own physical incapacities.[59] In this protest, Siebers writes, "three dozen wheelchair users…abandoned their chairs to crawl up the eighty-three marble steps of the Capitol building. None of the protestors, I suspect, made a practice of

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[57] Stone., 29-37.

[58] Tobin Siebers, "Disability as Masquerade," *Literature and Medicine*, 23.1(2004): 9.

[59] Ibid.

crawling up the steps of public buildings on a regular basis."[60] Siebers also accounts for what he considers harmful forms of disability masquerade, such as "disability drag," his term for nondisabled actors playing disabled characters.[61] Of particular import for the present inquiry, though, is the fact that Siebers recognizes that practices of disability masquerade, exaggerated and sometimes even resolutely untruthful enactments of disabled identity and embodiment, can serve projects of disability liberation. Susan Schweik also addresses the question of disability masquerade in her discussion of "disability fakers": ostensibly nondisabled beggars who, through theatrical practices of bodily display, represent themselves as disabled in their quotidian performances of begging.[62] She writes:

> Faking meant enacting marginalization and claiming abasement. Fakers were *presumed to have*–or in the parlance of the Americans with Disabilities Act, regarded as having–impairments and were treated accordingly. In this sense, in this model, disability imposters were disabled.[63]

Ellen Samuels pushes this question even further in her work on filmic representations of "disability cons." She borrows Stephen M. Fjellman's taxonomy of "the *real real*, the *fake real*, the *real fake*, and the *fake fake*" in order to demonstrate that "attempts to describe exactly

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[60] Ibid.

[61] I share Siebers' concern with the casting of nondisabled actors in disabled roles, both as a labor practice and because of the detrimental effect the refusals to confront the materiality of disability has on disability narratives that are able to circulate through culture. I take issue, though, with his description of such practices as "disability drag," and the implicit suggestion that drag is politically retrograde. Queer and feminist disability theorists would do well to take up the question of disability drag more fully.

[62] Susan Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 128.

[63] Ibid.

what we mean by 'fake disability' will always be blurry, contingent, and incomplete—much like attempts to describe exactly what we mean by 'disability.'"[64]

Disability studies scholarship has been slow to develop a critical perspective on work, but queer and feminist lines of analysis within the field have been exemplary in this regard. Nearly a decade after Taylor's publication of "The Right Not to Work," Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow observed that "most contemporary disability scholarship, while frequently discussing inaccessible workplace environments and other barriers to employment, does not place a high priority on arguments for increasing the amount of disability benefits or access to them."[65] McRuer and Mollow develop an alternative political perspective that "valu[es] illegitimate (perhaps impossible) ways of being disabled) ways, that is, that do not, cannot, or will not work."[66] They even develop a crip analogue to JudithJack Halberstam's valorization of a queer politics that might be summarized as "fuck marriage."[67] Rather than embrace disabled people who feel compelled to express their willingness to "work if only reasonable accommodations were granted," McRuer and Mollow instead champion those who "might protest: 'Fuck Employability: I'm too sick to work: and how am I supposed to live on $845 a month?'"[68] Alison Kafer's theorization of "crip time" also introduces a queer and feminist critique of work to disability studies by drawing upon

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[64] Samuels, 67-71.

[65] Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow, *Sex and Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 31.

[66] McRuer and Mollow, 25.

[67] Halberstam cited in McRuer and Mollow, 32.

[68] Ibid.

Halberstam's writings.[69] Like Halberstam's queer subjects, who engage in "eccentric economic practices," Kafer's disabled subjects include those who participate in "a kind of refusal of productivity" or who challenge dominant paradigms for productivity by "operat[ing] on the barter system, trading services and products below the radar of the state."[70] For Kafer, such crip negotiations of "productivity" respond, in part, to the impoverishing effects of income maintenance benefits and work disincentives (eligibility requirements for disability benefits that preclude the possibility of accruing income while receiving disability benefits.) Such economic eccentricities, she argues, "ease some of the financial pressure while also enabling crips to write or create without putting their health care in jeopardy."[71]

Kafer highlights the inadequacy of the work/nonwork distinction and identifies writing and creating – and perhaps, by extension, other forms of crip cultural and reproductive labor – as exemplary of such activity. If writerly and creative labor figures prominently within these informal economies, then the figure of the disability fraud, as she has been conjured by policymakers and redeemed by disability theorists – who performs in public parks, doctor's offices, welfare lines – insists that we ask: might performance labor, or theatrical labor, also figure within, or even constitute, an informal economy through which disabled people subsist?

"Performing Disemployment" demonstrates that performance has been central in the history of disability and American work and not only with regard to informal economic practice. Indeed, beginning in the 1970s, the United States witnessed the emergence of a

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[69] Kafer., 39.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

series of highly organized efforts by state agencies, municipal governments, disability activist communities, and individual artists to marshal disabled Americans as professional performers. The performing disabled subject, formerly derided by the welfare system for throwing into crisis the possibility of discerning who really must work and who may elect (or be compelled) not to, becomes at this time a paradigmatic American worker.

Disability Goes to Work in U.S. American Performance

State-led promotions of employment opportunities in the arts for disabled Americans proliferated in the 1970s, but they were not unprecedented. More than a decade prior to the passage of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, theatre artists, psychologists, and senior government administrators began campaigning for a state-funded professional repertory company for deaf actors.[72] Among those involved were Anne Bancroft, whose method acting preparations for her role as Annie Sullivan in William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker* led her to study "sign language, deafness, and deaf community" and to collaborate with psychologist Edna S. Levine.[73] These efforts experienced a fit of starts and stops until 1967, when collaborators secured funding for an all-deaf version of Euripides*' Iphigenia at Aulus*, which would come to be known as the debut production of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD).[74] Funding from a number of institutions, including the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Gallaudet University, and the Eugene O'Neill Foundation,

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[72] Stephen C. Baldwin, *Pictures in the Air: The Story of the National Theatre of the Deaf* (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1994).

[73] Ibid., 5-6.

[74] Ibid., 17.

was integral to founding and sustaining the company.[75] But it was Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, under the leadership of Mary Switzer and "grants authorized by [the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration] that allowed the birth of NTD."[76] While in its infancy, the company received substantial funding from government agencies, including the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) and the Department of Education.[77]

NTD increasingly sought out corporate sponsorship when Americans began to feel the effects of the Reagan Revolution in the early 1980s. But prior to this, the company's "primary sources of income were the Department of Education grants and performing fees" that the company made from professional tours of theatrical works nationally and internationally.[78] This move from government to foundation support was representative of a broader shift in arts funding: supports for the arts jumped from "about 5 percent" of foundation grantmaking budgets in the early 1960s to "about 14 percent of grant funds" in 1984.[79] As Patricia Ybarra and Jon Rossini note, this "financialization of the arts" and the move to matching grants derived from changes to the tax code in 1969 and other "governmental actions."[80]

The activism that led to the founding of NTD was principally concerned with the role of the deaf in the American workforce. As theatre historian Stephen C. Baldwin notes,

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Baldwin., 22.

[78] Ibid., 88.

[79] Joseph Zeigler, "The Reagan Years." In *Arts in Crisis: The National Endowment for the Arts Versus America* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1994), 45-66, at 65.

[80] Patricia Ybarra and Jon Rossini, "Neoliberalism, Historiography, Identity Politics: Toward a New Historiography of Latino Theatre." *Radical History Review* 112 (2012): 162-172, at 167.

while performance was a central feature of largely working-class deaf social clubs in the mid-twentieth century, "no one [deaf] ever dreamed of making acting a professional career."[81] NTD organizers who wrote grant proposals for VRA funding emphasized connections between the lack of opportunities for deaf actors in American theatre with the limited employment opportunities deaf Americans faced more generally. An early grant proposal reads: "three quarters of the deaf adult male working population and three-fifths of deaf working women are employed in manual occupations…manual occupation was, and still is, a 'traditional vocational pigeonhole for the deaf.' To break this undesirable situation, something like a repertory theatre is needed."[82] Developing a professional repertory theatre for deaf actors, then, was intended not only to provide employment to a limited number of deaf actors, but to serve a public pedagogical function. The National Theatre of the Deaf would charge hearing audiences for the opportunity to watch deaf actors labor on stage, and in so doing, educate them about deaf Americans' capacities for non-manual work.[83] Anticipating the ascendance of commercialized forms of affective and immaterial labor in the late twentieth century, acting would represent the forms of labor to which the deaf could, and perhaps *should*, aspire.

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[81] Baldwin, 4.

[82] Ibid., 14.

[83] Baldwin does not account for this push for the deaf to move away from manual labor, but this desire likely derived from the fact that oralism (lip reading and aural speech) had been proffered as a superior alternative to sign language for the deaf on the basis that it liberated the deaf worker's hands from signing in order to make her a more efficient worker who did not need to take her hands away from her work in order to communicate with a coworker or manager. While it still seems odd to describe the theatrical labor of performing an aestheticized form of American Sign Language as "non-manual," this distinction can be understood as signaling a form of work compatible with the deaf laboring body in which communication is treated as the content of the work, rather than a distraction from it. See Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory* (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999).

The National Theatre of the Deaf is perhaps an exceptional case within the history of state institutions, disability activists, and theatre workers collaborating to create theatrical employment opportunities for disabled Americans. Exceptional because the NTD remains the best known and longest-running disabled theatre company in the United States, and because its origins predate, by nearly two decades, the phenomenon traced in "Performing Disemployment." Undoubtedly, NTD set the stage for these later developments. The National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped, the subject of Chapter 2, explicitly drew upon NTD as model. But the proliferation of activity concerning disability and artistic labor, and especially theatrical labor, in the 1970s also emerged in response to the momentum of the disability rights movement in the same period. Allow me to turn to the disability rights movement briefly in order to illustrate the context in which performances of disemployment developed, as well as to illustrate the significance of disemployment for rethinking the scope and substance of the disability rights movement.

The disability rights movement featured people with a diverse range of disabilities forging a pan-disability coalition and demanding full participation in U.S. American public life. The origins of the disability rights movement are multiple and wide ranging, including anti-psychiatry activism in the 1960s and the pronounced influx of disabled veterans into the American citizenry in the wake of the Vietnam War. Additionally, gains made by the black freedom, feminist, and gay liberation movements provided disability activists with the language of civil rights and a repertoire of political actions. But most historians agree that the disability rights movement galvanized in response to the passage of 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which, to the retrospective bemusement of Congress, included a civil rights provision in Section 504. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a multifaceted bill, but, as disability historian Kim Nielsen writes, it was Section 504 and its civil rights provisions, "which would come to have the most significance for historians, activists, and the courts."[84] Section 504 declared that people with disabilities could not "be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."[85]As I discuss in Chapter One, bureaucratic inertia prevented government agencies from developing enforcement mechanisms that would implement the spirit of Section 504 until 1977, when HEW Secretary Joseph Calfino mandated that state agencies develop enforcement regulations. This requirement arose in response to disability rights actions across the nation, including a month-long occupation of the HEW office in San Francisco, which remains the longest occupation of a federal building in U.S. history. If, as historian Paul K. Longmore argued, President Richard Nixon's multiple vetoes of earlier versions of the Rehabilitation Act had fomented the disability rights movement by giving it "a focus, a unifying target," so, too, did the administrative delays that deferred implementing the civil rights promises of Section 504.[86]

The received historiography of the disability rights movement addresses the subject of work, but does not treat it as an exceptional concern. More often than not, employment appears within a relatively predictable list of other issues, including education, transportation, and other "institutional transformations that [would] better enable[e] the self-determination of those with disabilities."[87] To borrow the language of queer disability activist Eli Clare, unemployment is an enduring, but not isolated, "material condition of ableism."[88]

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[84] Kim Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 166.

[85] Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, cited in Nielsen, 166.

[86] Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 104.

[87] Nielsen, 161.

Nevertheless, discourses of work enter disability historians' and activists' accounts of disability policy and activism in the 1970s to multiple ends. Sometimes the subject of work appears within discussions of the disability rights movement in order to narrativize the career trajectories of leaders in the field. For example, few accounts of the period would fail to note the irony that Ed Roberts, a leader in the independent living movement, had been denied "financial aid for college, because" the California Department of Rehabilitation, of which Roberts would eventually be named director in 1975, "determined him unemployable."[89] Other times, the subject of work serves as the connective tissue that allows historians to explore intersections between the disability movement and other forms of minoritarian struggle. For example, Kim Nielsen notes how the 1970s witnessed a landmark victory when the AFL-CIO successfully unionized "a sheltered workshop in Clinton, Iowa."[90] This led the National Labor Relations Board to declare in 1979 that "sheltered workshop employees," disabled workers who regularly receive well below (sometimes less than half) the federally guaranteed minimum wage, "must be allowed the opportunity to unionize if they so desired."[91] And at other times, the subject of work figures not as a means for creating economic opportunity for disabled people, but for combatting somewhat abstract and vague forms of "prejudice." For example, a group of activists in Lima, Ohio championed the elimination of architectural barriers primarily insofar as it would make schools accessible to physically disabled children and by extension "make jobs more

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[88] Clare cited in Nielsen, 182-183.

[89] Nielsen, 162-3.

[90] Ibid., 176-7.

[91] Ibid.

accessible," allowing "a lot of prejudice [to] be broken down, especially in the area of handicapped teachers."[92]

As some accounts of disability policy and activism would have it, the 1970s was actually notable in that government initiatives tempered the emphasis on insisting that disabled Americans achieve economic independence through waged labor. For example, Richard Scotch notes that the Vocational Rehabilitation program of the 1970s

> reflected the [Center for Independent Living] influence in its shift of service priorities from a nearly exclusive programmatic emphasis on individuals with less severe impairments, who were considered more capable of entry into paid employment, to a more inclusive position encompassing those with more severe impairments. With this shift, the objective of VR went beyond supporting paid employment by people with disabilities to the more general goal of promoting independence.[93]

Historian Paul K. Longmore similarly emphasizes that the "radical changes" in vocational rehabilitation after 1973 concerned "persons with significant disabilities" for whom "the goal need not necessarily be employment, but preparation and assistance to live in the larger community rather than in nursing homes or institutions."[94] Indeed, Longmore notes that "rehabilitation professionals had unsuccessfully lobbied Congress" for independent living centers "for individuals for whom employment was not a practical objective" since at least 1959.[95] But Longmore also notes that as the 1970s drew to a close, "advances in medicine and rehabilitation technology along with the computer revolution had rendered obsolete the

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[92] Ibid.

[93] Richard Scotch, "American Disability Policy in the Twentieth Century." In *New Disability Histories: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 382-3.

[94] Longmore, 103.

[95] Ibid., 112.

dichotomy between independent living and work."[96] Transformations within vocational rehabilitation in the 1970s should not be understood, then, primarily as challenges to the role of work in disability policy. By introducing an expanded conception of the imagined subject of rehabilitative intervention, including those with more "severe" disabilities, policy in the 1970s also promoted and expanded the conceptual range of disabled Americans who would be considered employable, irrespective of the potential for their employability to lead to economic independence.

Queer disability activist and independent scholar Corbette O'Toole offers one of the most complex portraits of the mutual imbrications of work and independent living in her memoir, *Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History*.[97] O'Toole describes how attending to hiring practices within centers for independent living, which were staffed with disabled people, brings to the foreground issues of racism and racial disparity within the disability rights movement. With reference to her experience at the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, she writes: "While there were always disabled people of color hanging around CIL, they were rarely hired as staff."[98] O'Toole also discusses the informal and unwaged forms of labor that were required for sustaining independent living centers. For example, disabled people who staffed such centers were often unable to "take paid employment, even a minimal amount" without "los[ing] their health care and attendant care benefits," because of work disincentives that are structurally embedded within the eligibility criteria for income

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[96] Ibid., 112.

[97] Corbette O'Toole, *Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History* (Fort Worth: Autonomous Press, 2015).

[98] Ibid.,58.

maintenance programs for disabled Americans.[99] Given this constraint, the CIL compensated disabled staff with "environmental supports such as free rides in CIL's wheelchair accessible van, free office supplies to take home, daytime attendant care for eating and bathroom breaks, and other useful but not wage-oriented compensations."[100] O'Toole goes on to undermine her own insistence on attending to the organization of labor in independent living centers when she insists: "disabled people on government benefits did not work for CIL for the minimal in-kind exchange, though; they worked there because they believed in the mission of a disability rights organization that provided independent living support."[101] Nevertheless, O'Toole's discussion of the informal labor upon which independent living centers depended helps counter the erasure of work as a concern within 1970s policy and activism.

The following pages introduce a partial overview of the pervasive but contested connections among disability, work, and performance that unfolded alongside transformations within vocational rehabilitation policy during the 1970s and its aftermath. It is only by attending to a genealogy of disability performance in this period, by turning our attention toward theatre, that we can fully understand just how much these transformations within policy and activism engaged work as a primary concern. Indeed, inter-articulations of disability, performance, and work became nearly ubiquitous during this period. When O'Toole moved to Berkeley in the early 1970s, she found herself participating within a substantive, visibly disabled community for the first time. As she remembers it, she and her friends would "often [be] stared at as if the circus was in town," a distancing gaze she

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[99] Ibid., 83.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

preferred to the alternative: "being stared at as if we were runaways from a group home."[102] To be perceived as a circus performer was to be perceived as "weird," but it was also to be perceived as "independent" and "employed."[103]

The largest shift of resources towards arts employment for disabled Americans since the founding of the National Theatre of the Deaf occurred in 1978, the year that federal agencies began drafting new policies and plans for compliance with Section 504. The National Endowment for the Arts' regulations "[became] effective May 25, 1979," and Larry Mollow recounted that they were proud to be one of the first agencies to report their guidelines, second only to the Small Business Administration.[104] The NEA's proposal featured "Employment and Reasonable Accommodation" as a "major concept" within their regulations, alongside issues like "Program Accessibility" and "Architectural Accessibility."[105] The NEA regulations declared, "a grantee may not deny employment to a *qualified* handicapped person because of inaccessible facilities or the necessity to provide modified work schedules or equipment."[106] The NEA did not require that grantees "require affirmative action employment" or "barrier-free access to every floor in every building," but rather that "arts organizations make a part of every federally assisted program available to

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[102] Ibid., 90.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Larry Molloy to NEA 504 Task Force, 15 May 1979, Box 34, "The Grace of the Handicapped," Ron Whyte Papers.

[105] Memorandum from Robert Wade (General Counsel for the NEA), 30 May 1978, Box 94, Folder "National Task Force," Ron Whyte Papers.

[106] "504 and the Visual Arts," National Arts and the Handicapped Information Service, Box 34, Folder "Grace of the Handicapped," Ron Whyte Papers.

handicapped people."[107] At this time, the NEA also instituted its Office of Special Constituencies, which sought "to make the arts more accessible to handicapped people, older adults, veterans, gifted and talented, and people in hospitals, nursing homes, mental institutions, and prisons" and provides assistance to NEA grantees regarding accessibility and compliance with Section 504.[108] The NEA also joined forces with a nonprofit organizations called Educational Facilities Laboratories to create the National Arts and the Handicapped Information Service (NAHIS), a free service that "provides information that can be used to make arts programs and facilities more accessible" as well as help with "architectural barriers and technical assistance," among other issues.[109] NAHIS produced publications such as "Arts and the Handicapped: An Issue of Access" that featured "over 150 examples of how arts programs and facilities have been made accessible for the handicapped, from tactile museums to halls for performing arts."[110] Other publications included "Blind and Blindness in America," "Architecture and Accessibility," and "Technical Assistance Manual."[111] In the years that followed, the NEA also collaborated with government agencies like HEW and the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped to promote arts employment opportunities for disabled Americans.

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Paula Terry (NEA) to Ron Whyte (Attachment), 29 September 1983, Box 96, Folder "National Endowment for the Arts," Ron Whyte Papers.

[109] NAHIS Introduction Sheet, Box 104, Folder "National Arts and the Handicapped Information Service, ND," Ron Whyte Papers.

[110] Ibid.

[111] "Blind and Blindness in America," "Architecture and Accessibility," and "Technical Assistance Manual," National Arts and the Handicapped Information Service. Box 104, "National Arts and the Handicapped Information Service, ND," Ron Whyte Papers.

Most evidence concerning HEW's involvement with disability and arts employment concerns the agency's Region II office, headquartered in New York City and responsible for New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The 1973 Rehabilitation Act had "authorized" the Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA, an office within HEW) to "provide and purchase the services necessary to sponsor" career development opportunities for their clients, but struggled to adjudicate what was "viable and appropriate" in the case of disabled Americans who were interested in pursuing careers as artists.[112] The HEW Region II office joined forces with the NEA to address the challenges concerning "Arts and the Handicapped."[113] Beginning in April 1978, they hosted meetings at the World Trade Center in order to improve "career guidance to disabled clients who may be considering a career in the arts."[114] Thelma Schmones (from the RSA) and Lani Latin Duke (from the NEA's Office of Special Constituencies) convened nearly forty government administrators and arts professionals at these meetings, including representatives from Theatre Communications Group, the New York City Mayor's Office of the Handicapped, the National Black Arts Consortium, the National Theatre of the Deaf, Momentum Talent Management, and the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped.[115] The arts professionals present in these meetings disproportionately included theatre workers. Both Ron Whyte, a queer and disabled playwright who founded The National Task Force for Disability and the Arts in 1978 (Chapter One), and Rick Curry, a disabled Jesuit brother who founded The National

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[112] Thelma Schmones to Ron Whyte, 5 April 1978, Box 106, Folder "Department HEW-Thelma Schmones 1978, ND, " Ron Whyte Papers.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

[115] HEW/NEA Attendee List, 25 April 1978, Box 106, Folder "Department HEW – Thelma Schmones 1978, ND," Ron Whyte Papers.

Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped in 1977 (Chapter Two), attended at least some of these meetings.[116]

The joint HEW/NEA meetings at the World Trade Center addressed a wide range of issues concerning the challenges prompted by promoting arts work for disabled Americans. Some participants voiced anxieties about how best to protect disabled clients from predatory educational programs that might accept disabled artists regardless of merit, programs that "have rather vested interests in accepting almost any student for whom they are paid."[117] Representatives from the Screen Actors Guild expressed concern about the financial futures of disabled artists, noting that within the film industry, "job opportunities are quite poor for those who are already trained and available for employment."[118] Others in attendance recognized, of course, that such precarity was not inevitable and affirmed that "any effort the government could make on all levels to create job opportunities for the employment of artists would be not only timely but also most appreciated."[119] The government administrators at the meeting also took this as an opportunity to solicit the "guidelines and directions" from arts professionals for their clients and to enroll these professionals to participate on a "pilot panel of such consultants as may be feasible and appropriate."[120] By the time the meeting disbanded, some concrete progress had already been made. The agencies established a preliminary list of voluntary representatives from different

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[116] Ibid.

[117] HEW/NEA Meeting Minutes, 25 April 1978, Box 106, Folder "Department HEW – Thelma Schmones 1978, ND," Ron Whyte Papers.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Thelma Schmones to Ron Whyte, 5 April 1978, Box 106, Folder "Department HEW-Thelma Schmones 1978, ND, " Ron Whyte Papers.

art fields to participate in the client evaluation process, and it was resolved that vocational rehabilitation counselors should "seek more than one consult in evaluating talent in any field since there are broad gamuts of perception and appreciation even within the arts communities as to what constitutes talent."[121] Two major issues remained unresolved: the question of how to "disseminat[e] information to vocational rehabilitation counselors" and how best to incorporate working artists in the VR application process. As a result, Duke and Schmones set to planning a series of workshops for vocational rehabilitation counselors in New York.[122]

Vocational rehabilitation's shift to an emphasis on artistic employment for disabled people occurred in tandem with transformations in U.S. labor policy. 1973 marked not only the passage of the Rehabilitation Act, but also the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), which became the nation's primary administrative architecture for job training until 1982, when it would be replaced by Job Partnership Training Assistance (JPTA).[123] Previous policies implemented through the Manpower Development Training Act (MDTA) had been highly centralized. CETA, however, distinguished itself with fragmented programs that resulted from the distribution of block grants to local governments in the name of "flexible" responses to the needs of local markets.[124] One of the more controversial elements of CETA was its use of funds to create public sector employment opportunities that were to

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Lani Latin Duke to "Advisory Committee on Careers in the Arts for the Handicapped," 12 May 197, Box 106, Folder "Department HEW – Thelma Schmones 1978, ND," Ron Whyte Papers.

[123] Grace A. Franklin and Randall B. Ripley, "Preface" and "CETA: Programmatic Overview and Analytic Preview." In *CETA: Politics and Policy, 1973-1982* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), xi-xviii, 3-38.

[124] Ibid., 12-15.

be "temporary, locally controlled, and…a transition to regular employment."[125] Through Title VI of CETA and the supplemental funding from the Economic Stimulus Act of 1977, these public sector lines included surprisingly robust funding for arts jobs.

CETA's decentralized organizational structure thwarted efforts to understand the true breadth of federal investment in arts work at this time, but it is clear that CETA effectively created the largest federally funded program for arts workers since the Works Progress Administration.[126] Between 1974 and 1976 alone, CETA funded employment for more than 3,000 artists in cities including San Francisco, Seattle, Hartford, Albany, and Los Angeles.[127] But the largest allocation of CETA funds for a single venture was the CETA Artists Project in New York. In 1978, CETA hired 500 artists on one-year, $10,000 contracts. These artist lines represented an estimated $6.4 million in federal spending from the $55 billion that Congress allocated to CETA during its lifetime, and were part of an effort to create 14,000 jobs for New Yorkers in 1978 alone.[128] CETA artists mobilized, although their protests at Department of Labor events at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York

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[125] Ibid., 15. CETA was revised and amended several times between 1973 and its dissolution in 1982. Key components of CETA included the Emergency Jobs and Unemployment Assistance Act of 1974 (Title VI), which was designed for "recently unemployed workers'; the aforementioned Economic Stimulus Act of 1977, which more than doubled PSE enrollments; the Skills Improvement Training Act (Title III), which provided "long-term vocational training for experienced workers"; and additional programs including "on-the-job" training program for veterans"; multiple youth employment initiatives, and a system of "tax cuts for employers who hired certain targeted employees" (21).

[126] Ibid., 21; Author Unknown, "NYC OK'S ARTS JOBS," *Art Workers News*, October 1977. Box 123, Folder "Art Workers News," Ron Whyte Papers.

[127] Author Unknown, "Arts Jobs N.Y. CETA Proposal," *Art Workers News*, October 1976; Author Unknown, "New York C.E.T.A. Proposal," *Art Workers News*, December 1976/January 1977. Box 123, Folder "Art Workers News," Ron Whyte Papers.

[128] Franklin and Ripley, xii; Author Unknown, "NYC OK'S ARTSJOBS," *Art Workers News*, October 1977. Box 123, Folder "Arts Workers News," Ron Whyte Papers.

to renew their contracts beyond a year and to lobby for "permanent jobs for artists" were ultimately unsuccessful.[129] Still, the Cultural Council Foundation (CCF), an administrative body originally designed to secure private funding for the NYC Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, and that now administered part of the CETA artist lines, noted that they "hope[d] to create a demand for artistic services that [would] continue after the CETA program is completed."[130] They hoped to accomplish this by encouraging CETA artists to develop both "new marketable skills" and "a wider audience" for their work.[131]

Of the 500 artist lines, 300 were administered through CCF.[132] 141 of these lines were available for subcontracting to participating community sponsors, such as neighborhood associations and nursing homes, and an additional 159 were dedicated to one of several cultural organizations: the Association of American Dance Companies, the Association of Hispanic Arts, the Black Theatre Alliance, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the Foundation for the Community of Artists, the Foundation for Independent Video and Film, and Jazz Mobile. An additional 200 lines (50 each) were dedicated to four institutions: La MaMa E.T.C., the American Jewish Congress, Theatre for the Forgotten, and Hospital Audiences. In order to participate in the program, artists were required to reside in New York and to meet one of the following criterion for eligibility: demonstrate receipt of long-term unemployment assistance, be employed for fewer than ten hours per week/earn fewer

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[129] CETA Artists Organization Demonstration Flyer, No Date Box 8, Folder "Correspondence 1974-1986," Ron Whyte Papers.

[130] CCF Artists Project Community Sponsor Agreement, Box 103, Folder "CETA," Ron Whyte Papers.

[131] Cultural Council Foundation CETA Artists Program Community Sponsor Information Document, Box 103, Folder "CETA," Ron Whyte Papers.

[132] Richard Goldstein, "The CETA Arts Project: Buddy Can You Spare a Line," *The Village Voice*, 5 December 1977, Box 103, Folder "CETA," Ron Whyte Papers.

than thirty dollars per week through their unemployment, or have a family income less than 70% of the "lower living standard" based upon their most recent quarterly income.[133] Eligibility for the CCF-administered positions also required a bachelor's degree and two years of (vaguely-defined) experience. [134]

Participating artists received a $10,00 salary for a 35-hour work week that allocated fifty percent of their time to community service (workshops, lecture demonstrations, and performances), twenty-five percent of their time to preparation and commuting throughout New York's five boroughs, and twenty-five percent of their time to their own artistic practice.[135] The CCF rigorously monitored artists' timecards and creative output in order to guarantee, in the words of Project Director Rochelle Slovin, "flexibility" and "a high degree of accountability."[136] For example, the coordinator of CCF's pool of literary artists required those under her supervision to submit notebook pages each week as evidence of their productivity during their allocated "artist-initiated time."[137] Artists received their wages and benefits through the CCF as per the foundation's contract with the NYC Department of Employment, but community sponsors bore the responsibility of providing workers with

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[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Rochelle Slovin to Applicants for CETA Artist Positions, Box 103, Folder "CETA," Ron Whyte Papers.

[136] Ibid.

[137] CCF/CETA Literary Pool Timesheet, Box 103, Folder "CETA," Ron Whyte Papers.

scheduling, "work, space, equipment, materials, reimbursement for travel," and appropriate advertising for and credit for their work.[138]

The CETA Artists Project and the creation of other public service arts jobs under CETA unfolded in tandem with the turn to artistic labor within in HEW Region II's office, but ideas about disability also played out in the CETA Artists Project itself. Claude Shostal, New York's first Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, "encouraged" not only "minorities" and "veterans" but "the handicapped" to apply for artist lines through CETA.[139] In his critical account of the problems that purportedly pervaded every facet of the project's administration, Richard Goldstein reported that "unofficial guidelines" prioritized "people over 45 or the handicapped."[140] Goldstein mentioned this purported bias in order to compound anxiety about conflicting accounts of quotas regarding gender and race: he cites a CCF volunteer who informed him of such quotas but that CCF officials denied their existence. Goldstein used predictable ableist, racist, and sexist rhetoric in order to ventriloquize anxieties that concerns with identitarian difference were interfering with the possibility of a "meritocracy."[141] In light of the CCF's "acknowledged priorities," writes Goldstein, "you stood your best chance if you were a 50 year old handicapped female veteran from Queens who could paint."[142]

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[138] Cultural Council Foundation CETA Artists Project Community Sponsor Agreement, Box 10 Folder "Correspondence 1983-1985, N.D.," Ron Whyte Papers.

[139] Goldstein.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

Goldstein's account of CETA's purported bias in favor of disabled artists is particularly laughable when one considers the experiences of disabled artists who sought arts employment through CETA. Consider the experience of Ron Whyte, a queer playwright with mobility impairments. Following a failed attempt to have his nascent organization, The National Task Force for Disability and the Arts, included in the CETA Artists Project as a community sponsor, Whyte attempted to apply for one of the artist lines. But his efforts were repeatedly obstructed by physically inaccessible buildings, prompting him to write a letter to project director Rochelle Slovin. It reads:

> As a former editor of the *Soho Weekly News* and a current member of the National Endowment for the Arts 504 Taskforce, I strongly protest the lack of access and runaround. I cannot be the only handicapped person who, by your own forms, was invited to register and finally denied access. I look forward to an early response from your office to this matter. If I do not hear from you within the week, I shall be compelled to bring this deplorable mess to the attention of the *New York Times*, disability consumer groups, the ACLU, NEA, and HEW.[143]

Following these meetings, Whyte reported that "CETA has expressed an interest in working out a relationship to the National Task Force for Disability and the Arts…whereby the Task Force will assist CETA to integrate more disabled artists into the Federally Funded CETA program."[144] According to Whyte, such integration would be achieved through providing disabled artists with information and transportation, establishing "guidelines and precedents for disabled artists," and eventually setting a hiring quota for artists with disabilities.[145] No such guidelines were ever created, and no disability-related quota was ever established, however, as the CETA Artists Project was not renewed for future years. Whyte eventually

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[143] Ron Whyte to The Director of CETA Artists Project (Draft), No Date, Box 103, Folder "CETA," Ron Whyte Papers.

[144] Untitled Document by Ron Whyte, Box 97, Folder "RCFA Grant 1977, 1 of 2," Ron Whyte Papers.

[145] Ibid.

did receive a CETA line in the CCF's literary arts pool, where he joined the likes of now-notable feminist, black, and Nuyorican writers including Lynda Schor, Nikki Grimes, Norman Henry Pritchard III, Pedro Pietri, and Sandra Maria Esteves.[146] Through his CETA line, Whyte was also appointed as a playwright-in-residence at John Jay College and a part-time editor at *American Book Review*.[147]

The CETA Artists Project's distribution of material resources to disabled artists was underwhelming, to say the least: Whyte is the only disabled artist I have been able to identify that received a CETA line. Nevertheless, disabled artists figured prominently within publicity literature for the project, suggesting that the possibility for such jobs to benefit disabled workers helped establish the legitimacy of state-funded arts jobs through CETA. For example, a single issue of *Art Workers News*, a periodical published by the Foundation for the Community of Artists (FCA), which hired CETA Artists to document the CETA Artists Project, featured at least two articles concerning disabled artists without CETA affiliations. "Handicapped Artist Close-Up: Lynn Spottswood" puts a spotlight on an actor-turned-filmmaker who changed artistic career trajectories following a car accident that resulted in her paralysis.[148] The article narrates how, when her husband divorced her after she became disabled, Spottswood pursued financial independence by taking a film-editing job at Nightingale Film Services that she received through job training from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and which enabled her to pursue simultaneously independent

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[146] CCF/CETA Poetry at Pleiades Flyer, September 1978, Box 124, Folder "Printed Material," Ron Whyte Papers.

[147] CETA/CCF Community Sponsor Application, Box 103, Folder "CETA," Ron Whyte Papers.

[148] Daniel Grant, "Handicapped Artist Close-Up: Lynn Spottswood," *Art Workers News*, October 1976, Box 123, Folder "Art Workers News," Ron Whyte Papers.

projects in screenwriting and film production. *Art Workers News* lauds Spottswood for only temporarily drawing upon state resources before landing employment in the private sector, and ultimately frames disability not as an obstacle to participating in the labor market, but as a resource. Reports Spottswood:

> My accident had a very good effect on the course of my life . . . I've been forced to be courageous and take the reins of my life. It takes a lot of patience and persistence. In terms of being an artist and a woman, I had no choice but to try twice as hard as others to fulfill myself and my goals….being paralyzed, I found that one needs imagination just to get out of bed and do something; to me, self-reliance means imagination.[149]

A second article functioned almost expressly as an advertisement for services available to disabled artists from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the New York Department of Labor.[150] "N.Y. State Services for Disabled Artists" specifies that people with mental, physical, and emotional disabilities are eligible for these resources, but that those with emotional disabilities must be "undergoing treatment" at the time of application.[151] Like the companion piece on Lynn Spottswood, this article emphasizes that these state resources are intended only as temporary relief en route to competitive employment. It reads: "The purpose of all programs devised for the applicants is to get them into society and make them self-supporting."[152]

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[149] Ibid.

[150] Author Unknown, "N.Y. State Services for Disabled Artists," *Art Workers News*, October 1976, Box 123, Folder "Arts Workers News," Ron Whyte Papers.

[151] Ibid. Note that "mental" and "emotional" disabilities are the AWN article's original language, with the former likely intending to connote intellectual disabilities and the latter suggesting psychosocial disabilities that are popularly assumed by the moniker "mental illness."

[152] Ibid.

CETA also represented the significance of arts work for the disabled through "Short Takes," a feature column in the project's publication, *Journal*. Notably, the first CETA artist featured in this column was none other than disabled playwright Ron Whyte.[153] The feature discussed Whyte's work at John Jay College, which included "setting up a drama library, assembling a collection of found poems, and writing a play based on material from court transcripts and exciting books like *Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent Classes* published in 1893," participating in post-show talkbacks, and performing as a victim and defendant at mock trial competitions.[154] The column also recounted Whyte's experience attending the "Fourth International Congress on Religion, the Arts, Architecture, and the Environment," where he organized a seminar entitled "Out of the Attic: Surviving Disability, Liberation and the Arts."[155] Whyte reported that this opportunity provided him, "a disabled artist, a chance to remind everybody that CETA programs could be lifesavers for other disabled artists."[156]

The Artists Project in New York was the most robust of CETA's efforts to provide artists with work, but other opportunities developed outside of New York, and some of these explicitly addressed disability. Funding for arts employment and a concern for people with disabilities also converged within or adjacent to CETA operations in Maine.[157] Following a conference on "Drama and Theatre by, with, and For the Handicapped," at the O'Neill Theatre Center (Connecticut) in 1979, Beth Hartman, Burton Alho, and Sarajane

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[153] Ron Whyte, "Short Takes," *Journal: News of the Cultural Council Foundation Artists Project*, 1.4, June 1978, Box 85, Folder "National Task Force," Ron Whyte Papers.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Penobscot Employment Consortium to Colleagues, No Date, Box 9, Folder "Correspondence 1972-1980, N.D.," Ron Whyte Papers.

Jewett of the Penobscot Consortium Training and Employment Administration – a "CETA Prime Sponsor" – gathered information on the "wealth of opportunities" for theatre-based "career opportunities for the handicapped."[158] Their goal was to produce a catalogue of relevant opportunities so that they could be replicated across the country and further increase employment opportunities. By 1980, Hartman and Alto assumed the roles of "Associate Artistic Producers" of multiple projects funded by the Maine Council for Humanities and Public Policy. Among these projects were a document titled "The Disabled: An Economic and Human Resource," and two docudramas based upon interviews with the elderly, *Old Age: Tradition Shelved or Shared* and the disabled, *As Others See Us*, which toured throughout Maine, performing for those "who make or influence public policy."[159] Hartman and Alho developed a version of their docudramas that downsized the cast to require only two performers, a production that would be more economically viable in their efforts to embark upon a national tour to colleges and social services organizations that would be paired with discussions to evaluate "the strengths and weaknesses of current public policies that have an impact upon the lives of the elderly and disabled."[160]

In the next section, I turn to an interdisciplinary theoretical archive that uses the figure of the actor to explain these transformations, emphasizing in particular lines of analysis that help explain how theatrical labor functions as both a form of work and a practice for critiquing work politics. Reading the historical shifts regarding disability and artistic employment alongside these theoretical discussions insists that we understand these

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[158] Ibid.

[159] Penobscot Employment Consortium to Ron Whyte, 19 March 1980, Box 8 Folder "Correspondence," Ron Whyte Papers.

[160] Ibid.

turns to the actor as a paradigmatic worker and to theatre and performance as a paradigmatic form of employment for disabled Americans, as mutually constitutive endeavors: when the worker became an actor, the disabled became employable. Furthermore, these developments suggest the importance of disability perspective in explorations of how and why acting and performance achieve such explanatory purchase for divergent political projects in the history of U.S. American work.

Theatre and Work, In Theory

"Performing Disemployment" traces the afterlife of the institutions, practices, and policies that developed in the late 1970s to promote artistic employment, and especially theatrical labor, as paths to economic independence for disabled Americans. The following chapters collectively demonstrate that commitments to employing disabled Americans through theatre and performance persisted over the next half century. But these chapters also demonstrate that the evolution of disemployment included disabled artists and activists employing theatre and performance practices to critique the prevailing emphasis on work within disability policy and activism. I have addressed how work figured within disability policy and activism of the 1970s and how recent critical disability theorists and activists have criticized the conflation of disability politics with the problem of access to gainful employment. And I have illustrated some of the emergent activist and government mechanisms that turned to artistic labor in general and theatrical labor in particular. But the question remains: why theatre and performance? How is it that theatre and performance achieve significant purchase for such seemingly disparate, even contradictory political projects? In order to understand this, it is necessary to review some broader changes in the organization and practice of work in the past half-century, and the prominent role of theatrical and performance labor within these transformations.

The transition to neoliberal capitalism and its attendant forms of market-based governance has been accompanied by transformations in the organization and practice of work. For sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, this transition is characterized by the incorporation of "personal services" and "work relations" into the commodity sphere.[161] Maurizio Lazzarato distinguishes this new form of labor from its predecessor on the basis of materiality. Whereas material labor produces commodities "destroyed in the act of consumption," "the commodity produced through immaterial labor. . . enlarges, transforms, and creates the 'ideological' and cultural environment of the consumer."[162] Other theorists highlight how such labor remains exceedingly material insofar as it mobilizes practices of embodiment, often in highly gendered terms. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt offer that "affective labor" (such as "health services," care labor, and even the entertainment industry) is "better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of 'women's work' have called "labor in the bodily mode."[163] They continue: "Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower."[164] Feminist sociologist Arlie Hochschild conducted ethnographic research with flight attendants in order to understand the "active emotional labor involved in selling" one's

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[161] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2007), 442.

[162] Lazzarato, Quoted in Gill and Pratt, 6.

[163] Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) 292-293.

[164] Ibid., 293.

personality and the commercialization of feelings in which "seeming to 'love the job' becomes part of the job; and actually trying to love it…helps the worker in this effort."[165]

Scholars disagree about which aspects of this transformation most warrant emphasis, and they disagree further about the extent to which this transformation creates opportunities for resistance, for workers to turn capitalism against itself. There is, however, something of an unacknowledged consensus that the figure of the actor is the paradigmatic laborer within this new world of work. Time and time again, theorists of affective and immaterial labor turn to figure of the actor or the performing artist to explain this transformation. Hochschild, for example, discusses the difference between "surface acting" in which "we try to change how we outwardly appear" with "deep acting," in which "the actor does not try to *seem* happy or sad but rather expresses…a real feeling that has been self-induced."[166] She places "deep acting" within a Stanislavskian acting tradition and even provides an example of flight attendants using, in Stanislavski's terms, "emotion memories" to act as if the cabin of the aircraft were their own living room.[167] The figure of the actor also appears squarely in Chiapello and Boltanski's account of the changing status of "inauthenticity" under post-Fordism. Whereas previously "mass production and standardization" was understood as "inauthentic" insofar as it "dissolved difference," the ascendance of affective labor has entailed "a definition of the inauthentic as reproduction of differences for commercial ends, as copy, to which the authenticity of an original can be counterposed."[168] Boltanski and

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[165] Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), xvii, 6.

[166] Ibid., 35.

[167] Ibid., 90.

[168] Chiapello and Boltanski, 449.

Chiapello even turn to Jonas Barish's *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* in order to explain the anxieties about actorliness – namely "the ability to produce the external signs of emotion" – operative within this new labor regime.[169] Paulo Virno emphasizes the "virtuosity" of the "performing artist" rather than the actor in order to understand labor's subsumption of politics.[170] He understands post-Fordist workers to be virtuosos like the performing artist for two reasons: first, because the activity of the performing artist "finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end production" and, second, because virtuosity "is an activity which requires the presence of others, which exists only in the presence of an audience."[171]

As the figure of the actor persists within interdisciplinary discussions of affective and immaterial labor, scholars within the fields of theatre and performance studies have revitalized discussions of theatre and/as labor. Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider have been particularly instructive for demonstrating how and why the actor has achieved such purchase for explaining transformations within work more broadly. Schneider links the constitutive again-ness of the actor's re-presentational activity to the promise of understanding mimetic practices as labor. For Schneider, "the hard labor of the live" becomes "rendered apparent as labor" through repetition, through the efforts of "radically

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[169] Ibid., 450.

[170] Paulo Virno, "Labor, Action, Intellect." In *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 51-2.

[171] Ibid., 52. Virno adopts these two dimensions of virtuosity as mutually determining: "virtuosos need the presence of an audience precisely because they are not producing an end product, an object which will circulate throughout the world once the activity has ceased. Lacking a specific extrinsic product, the virtuosos have to rely on witnesses." Virno contextualizes his argument within a specifically Marxist distinction between "immaterial or mental activity that "results in commodities which exist separate from the producer" and in which "the product is not separable from the act of producing" (52-53).

rigorous mimesis."[172] Ridout, in exploring the question of the repetition at the heart of the actor's labor, helps demonstrate why – even when thralls to vague notions of "creativity" continue to flourish – that it is the actor in particular, and not the artist in general, who gains such explanatory traction within accounts of affective and immaterial labor. When discussing modern acting techniques that emerged in tandem with industrial capitalism, Ridout suggests

> the disquieting possibility that the activities required of a theatrical performer are more like those of any other worker (the repetitive development of a skill and its daily exercise for wages), than they are like those to the new bourgeois ideal of the artist, whose work is supposed to be spontaneous and free from the disciplines of wage labor.[173]

Ridout's account of the actor differs significantly from the bourgeois artist, even as he figures in Boltanski and Chiapello's "artistic critique" and Virno's virtuosic "performing artist" whose (musical) performance purports to be spontaneous, improvisatory, and non-referential.[174] By virtue of repetition, the labor of the actor marks itself as being labor. From this perspective, it is because theatrical labor might be understood to have a greater proximity to wage-labor than other art forms, that it is the actor rather than, say, the visual artist, who figures so prominently within accounts of affective and immaterial labor concerned with a generalized sense of "creativity."

But there is another dimension of theatrical labor that makes it particularly well-suited to the multiple and competing political projects of disemployment: its ambivalent status as work. Ridout and Schneider collaboratively point to this ambivalence when they ask whether the "'not not' work of theatre and its production of subjectivities offer productive

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[172] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 10, 16.

[173] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20.

[174] Ibid., 58-59.

(or unproductive) ways of thinking about changes in the nature of work, its place in the life of the present, and its relation to futurity."[175] For Ridout, the phenomenon of stage fright, which emerged in tandem with the rise of modern acting techniques and industrial capitalism, ushers into high relief the ambivalence of the actor's theatrical labor.[176] In the event of stage fright, the actor produces what Ridout calls a "semiotic shudder" in which it becomes unclear whether the actor is producing a sign or failing to produce one, and by extension, it becomes unclear whether she is working or failing (or refusing) to do so.[177] Far from exceptional, the semiotic shudder undergirds the entire enterprise in which the actor's status as a worker is undecidable. Ridout extends this line of analysis in *Passionate Amateurs*, arguing that "the detour taken through the theatre leads through a past that is not past and is accomplished through work that looks like it is not work."[178]

Indeed, the work that appears not be work at all would seem to describe much of the activity that has become central to affective and immaterial labor. Lazzarato observes, for example, that "immaterial labor involves a series of activates that are not normally recognized as work such as the shaping of artistic standards and consumer norms."[179] Gill and Pratt even wonder if the seemingly unlaborish activity of immaterial labor creates – or should create – an obstacle to labor organizing across difference. They ask if it would

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[175] Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction." *TDR. Precarity and Performance*. 56.4 (2012): 5-9.

[176] Ridout, 66.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Nicholas Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, Love* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 54.

[179] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor." In *Radical Thought in Italy*: *A Potential Politics*. Eds. Michael Hardt and Paulo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133-147.

"actually be in the best interests of the maquiladora worker to ally herself with the fashion designer," given "the distinct modes of exploitation in operation."[180] Even as she understands flight attendants to be descendants of Stanislavski's Tortsov, Arlie Hochschild mobilizes an understanding of theatrical labor that takes it as being closer to "not work" than "not not work" (per Ridout and Schneider), and thus, excludes actors from the category of affective laborers deserving of scholarly analysis (and, one assumes, political concern).[181] She writes: "We do not think twice about the use of feeling in the theater…It is when we come to speak of exploitation of the bottom by the top in any society that we become morally concerned."[182] Hochschild's account suggests that if the actor is a paradigmatic worker under neoliberal capitalism, then so, too, is she exceptional. Her work is "not not work" enough to represent a shift in the content of work within affective and immaterial labor, but risks being "not work" enough to be excluded from accounts of it.

It is precisely because of the actor's ambivalent status as a worker that disabled artists and activists were able to successfully mine theatre and performance practices to enact their critiques of work as the horizon of disability policy and activism. If, as Julia Bryan-Wilson argues, the coherence of the figure of the "art worker" is challenging, the coherence of the disabled actor is perhaps especially so.[183] Theatre and performance theorists challenge the presumption of the newness of affective labor by establishing continuities between the modern actor as she emerges within industrial capitalism, and as she becomes a paradigmatic laborer within late twentieth and early twenty-first century neoliberal capitalism, precisely

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[180] Gill and Pratt, 13.

[181] Ridout and Schneider.

[182] Hochschild, 12.

[183] Bryan-Wilson, 27.

because she is not *not* a worker. When we turn away from the modern actor and toward the welfare state during this same transition – industrial capitalism to neoliberal capitalism – we see the reinvention of "unemployable" disabled people as employable, without necessarily reinventing the unemployed disabled as the employed disabled. Within this transition, the disabled non-worker becomes, perhaps, not not a worker. But as "Performing Disemployment" demonstrates, turning toward the U.S. American welfare state in this period does not require that we turn away from the actor: in fact, it insists that we look at her more closely. It is the disabled actor to whom this dissertation attends, the nonworker (by virtue of her disability) who performs the nonwork work of the actor, onstage and off. Ridout offers that because theatre so often passes itself off as "nonwork or play," it offers a "good place" for the "passionate amateur or romantic anti-capitalist who wants to find some way of undoing, even if only for a moment, the time of work and the work of time upon herself."[184] "Performing Disemployment" unearths a new archive of performance that suggests that disability theatre offers an especially good place for such ventures.

Chapter Overviews

"Performing Disemployment" follows a trajectory of nearly fifty years of U.S. American art, activism, and social policy, moving from the years leading up to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act to performances commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Chapter One, "The Disemployable Ron Whyte," examines a constellation of performance practices enacted by Ron Whyte, a queer and disabled playwright, who was at the forefront of national conversations about disability, theatre, and work. I address both a

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[184] *Passionate Amateurs*, 9.

lecture through which Whyte entrepreneurialized his antiwork politics (1984) and an epistolary collaboration (1972-1977) through which Whyte and his colleagues performed "bureaucratic drag," linking imperatives for disabled Americans to work with anxieties about disability fraudulence. These performances, some of which predate the flourish of activity around disability and arts work in the late 1970s, demonstrate that disemployment was a conflicted project from the beginning: Whyte, one of the key architects of employment opportunities for disabled artists proves to be one of the most ardent critics of compulsory labor for disabled Americans.

"Rehabilitating (Occupational) Realism," Chapter Two, concerns the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped, a professional training program for blind and physically disabled actors that flourished between 1977 and 2010. I demonstrate that the workshop's trajectory was informed by two distinct but related projects: rehabilitating disabled people's understandings of themselves as employable, and rehabilitating disabled people's relationship to "genuineness," or authenticity. For rehabilitating their students' employability, the workshop targeted what mid-century sociologists and behavioral psychologists called "occupational realism." For rehabilitating their students' genuineness, the workshop took aim at a realism of a different kind: the acting system associated with the legacy of Constantin Stanislavski.

The third and final chapter, "Entrepreneurial Acts," concerns The 25/40 Celebration, a disability arts and politics festival staged in Washington, DC in 2015 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the 40th anniversary of VSA (formerly "Very Special Arts," formerly National Committee-Arts for the Handicapped), a disability arts and education initiative administered by the Kennedy Center. I account for how "25/40" represented and enacted disability entrepreneurship as the ADA’s most laudable legacy, and demonstrate how artists, scholars, government workers, and spectators both bolstered and contested this entrepreneurial paradigm. In so doing, I explore how and why the disabled entrepreneur has achieved such explanatory and affective power within disability politics, and illuminate the limitations of entrepreneurial paradigms for disability performance history and disability historiography more broadly.

CHAPTER ONE

The Disemployable Ron Whyte:
Prosthetic Performance and Bureaucratic Drag

The history of disemployment is the history of government agencies promoting artistic labor, especially theatrical performance, as the paradigmatic pathway for disabled Americans to move from welfare to work. But the history of disemployment is also the history of how disabled artists have mobilized these resources for a variety of projects; the history of activist communities and individual disabled artists developing theatrical labor as a site of economic and political opportunity; and the history of how disabled artists and activists have marshaled theatre and performance practices to contest the reduction of disability politics to the question of employment. The history of disemployment includes artists imagining and enacting new horizons for disability policy and activism, or even forsaking the aspirational thrall of the horizon altogether.

These multiple (mis)alignments among disability, work, welfare, and performance do not represent distinct historical and political trajectories. Rather, they are entangled threads within a broader shift in which theatre and performance emerged as the critical nexus of disability politics and work in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century United States. This chapter addresses the complex enmeshment of these seemingly contradictory political orientations through an examination of the (non)work of disabled and queer playwright Ron Whyte. Whyte developed provocative antiwork performance practices, but he also lent his expertise to government agencies in order to usher disabled people toward the arts marketplace. His refusal to occupy a consistent political position regarding the importance of work for disabled Americans overlapped with (and in some cases, even anticipated) the most widespread efforts of state agencies to champion disabled Americans as actors and performing artists. Disemployment was a multivalent and conflicted, if not outright paradoxical, from the start.

After an initial introduction to Ron Whyte's life and career at the nexus of disability, theatre, and work, this chapter consists of two sections, each of which addresses a performance, or constellation of performance practices, through which Whyte performed disemployment. Disemployment describes the theatre and performance practices that have come to mediate disabled Americans' access to, and experience with, work and welfare in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[1] In my usage, the conjunction of "dis" and "employment" signifies doubly. Disemployment describes both performance practices that have proven central to efforts to usher disabled Americans toward the labor market and those proven central to efforts to negate or otherwise contest employment as the prevailing goal of disability politics.

The first section, "Prosthetic Disemployment," addresses a lecture Whyte delivered about his "cosmetic glove" at a 1984 lower-extremity prosthetics conference sponsored by SUNY Stony Brook and the Nassau County Medical Center.[2] I consider Whyte's lecture and the everyday social performances it purports to archive alongside writings on and representations of "the uncanny valley" by Masahiro Mori, the Japanese roboticist who

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[1] In current usage, "disemployment" refers to the "absence or withdrawal of employment." disemˈployment, n.". *OED Online*. June 2016. Oxford University Press. *http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54206?redirectedFrom=disemployment*, accessed 12 June, 2016.

[2] Ron Whyte's script for a lecture at the Fourth Annual Advanced Course on Lower Extremity Prosthetics (hereafter Prosthetics Lecture Script; cited parenthetically in the text as PLS; page numbers added by author) at SUNY Stony Brook, 12–14 September 1984, Box 70, Folder "Unsorted Writings," Ron Whyte Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter Ron Whyte Papers).

invented the term,[3] and graphs of "the uncanny valley" that Whyte inserted into publicity materials for the National Task Force for Disability and the Arts.[4] Reading these texts together elucidates how Whyte enthusiastically embraced, rather than dismissed, the state-resourced cosmetic glove on account of its aesthetic and functional failure. In so doing, he contested a political milieu increasingly concerned with weaning people with disabilities from welfare benefits and putting them to work. Paradoxically, perhaps, Whyte also shored up this same milieu by entrepreneurializing his own refusal of work in the form of his performance of this lecture *as* work.

The 1984 lecture was hardly Whyte's first foray into performance practices suspicious of uncritical valorizations of work within disability policy and activism. The second section, "Bureaucratic Drag," moves back a decade to consider Whyte's five-year performance collaboration that emerged in tandem with President Richard Nixon's 1972 veto (his second) of the legislation that would eventually become the 1973 Rehabilitation Act.[5] On both occasions, Nixon contended that the legislation did not sufficiently mandate workforce participation for disabled Americans seeking resources to facilitate their independence. In many ways, the conventions and political commitments of this earlier performance collaboration anticipate those of his 1984 lecture. It even feature stock characters like a government functionary "run[ing] a few little surveys" that Whyte plays

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[3] Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," translated by Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Spectrum*, 12 June 2012, *http://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/the-uncanny-valley*, accessed 04 June 2016.

[4] NTFDA Uncanny Valley document, n.d., Box 1, Folder "Correspondence 1970–1982, N.D.," Ron Whyte Papers.

[5] Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 103-4.

toward the lecture's conclusion (PLS 9).[6] Whyte's earlier bureaucratic impostures were enacted primarily through an epistolary mode: the production, distribution, reception, and management of infelicitous documents that mimicked bureaucracy's material remains: paperwork. Whyte and his collaborators mobilized resolute artifice (and at times, deliberate fraudulence) as a challenge to alignments of disability with authenticity. Through this bureaucratic labor, they performed work that was also a disavowal of work. This collaboration, which I theorize as "bureaucratic drag," demonstrates how performances of disemployment contested how national political discourses tethered disability to employment even before those efforts became sedimented following the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. Attending to this collaboration reveals how Whyte and his collaborators enacted disemployment by contesting and reimagining the administrative apparatuses responsible for the production – and destruction – of disabled subjecthood in the late twentieth century United States.

Ron Whyte's Disemployment

Whyte is a helpful figure through whom to consider the history of disemployment because, from the 1970s until his death in 1989, he was at the vanguard of national conversations at the intersection of disability, theatre, and work. Educated at San Francisco State College and the Yale School of Drama (and later at Union Theological Seminary), Whyte was a prolific queer and disabled artist whose plays and musicals were produced nationally at venues that included Cherry Lane Theatre (New York), Arena Stage (Washington, DC), and American Conservatory Theatre (San Francisco) and internationally

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[6] As mentioned in note 1, Whyte's Prosthetics Lecture Script (PLS) is cited parenthetically in the text.

in Chile and Denmark. Many of these works—including *Welcome to Andromeda*, *Funeral March for a One-Man Band*, and *The Extinction of Alexander Pope*—thematized disability. In addition to writing for theatre, Whyte authored screenplays, video art, and criticism, and he worked in a number of editorial capacities, including a two-year stint in the 1970s as Arts Editor for the *Soho Weekly News*. Whyte's administrative accomplishments match his creative output. He served as a disability arts consultant for the HEW Region II office and collaborated with the National Endowment for the Arts to ensure that the agency complied with Section 504, the nondiscrimination clause of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which was the first major piece of civil rights legislation for disabled Americans. Perhaps most important, he founded the NTFDA and served as the organization's executive director from 1978 until its dissolution sometime before 1981.

Whyte's performances warrants attention not only because it participates in the genealogy of disability performance practices I include under the rubric of disemployment, but also because it enacts the dual edges of disemployment: it models performance as both a form of work and as a resource for contesting compulsory labor. It further deserves attention because of the professional context in which Whyte performed it. Whyte lived in a chronic state of precarity throughout his career, scrambling for economic security through a combination of writing, consulting, administration, sex work, disability benefits, and emergency relief from both private philanthropy and professional organizations. This scramble intensified in the early 1980s. On the surface, the early years of the new decade appeared promising enough for Whyte. He received a 1980 Rockefeller Foundation Grant alongside some (now) recognizable luminaries including Lee Breuer, Elizabeth LeCompte, and Spalding Gray.[7] Arena Stage mounted Whyte's *Disability, A Comedy* in 1981, and his stage adaptation of Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was in preproduction at the New York Shakespeare Festival the next year. During this time, he also enjoyed a three-and-a-half year appointment as coordinator of the tumultuous Playwrights Unit at the Actors Studio (then with Lee Strasberg at the helm), a position previously occupied by the likes of Clifford Odets and Edward Albee.[8]

But the 1980s were also a period of tremendous loss for Whyte. His collaborator, neighbor, and friend, the art critic Gregory Battcock, was murdered in December 1980, and the NTFDA dissolved around the same time, likely for financial reasons. He experienced chronic health problems (including muscular atrophy and tissue damage) as a result of ill-fitting leg prosthetics. By fall 1984, Whyte—who had been ambulatory with the use of crutches—anticipated that he would need to use a wheelchair full-time for the next three years.[9] In the context of New York City's inaccessible terrain, these health problems and changes in mobility exhausted his stamina, compromising his ability to participate in the physically grueling rehearsal processes for his plays. In light of this, he attempted to move from New York to the comparatively more accessible Washington, DC, "a community

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[7] "9 Playwrights Win Rockefeller Grants," *New York Times*, 27 April 1980, Box 5, Folder "Correspondence 1976–1980," Ron Whyte Papers.

[8] Ron Whyte to Lee Strasberg, 16 December 1981, Box 93, Folder "Actors Studio," Ron Whyte Papers; Ron Whyte to Jean Kennedy Smith, 14 April 1984, Box 110, Folder "First Annual Integrated Young Playwrights Festival," Ron Whyte Papers.

[9] Ron Whyte to Virginia Sanford, Connecticut Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, [?] October 1984, Box 11, Folder "Correspondence," Ron Whyte Papers.

where it's more convenient for me to get around," where he hoped to begin a residency at Arena Stage and to pursue consulting opportunities.[10]

The move to DC did not work out, but Whyte began splitting his time between New York and New Haven, where he had attended the Yale School of Drama and where the family of his partner, Paul William Bradley, lived. He continued to write plays, but he also embarked on a diverse array of other writing projects, including the initial phases of editing a nineteenth-century American theatre history "sourcebook" that he imagined as a more specialized companion volume to A. M. Nagler's *A Source Book in Theatrical History*.[11] Whyte also consulted for *Profiles in the Arts*, a collaborative publication venture between the National Endowment for the Arts and the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped.[12] The goal of the publication was to "cause people with disabilities to be more aware of the career opportunities in the arts; and make arts administrators more aware of the accomplishments of [disabled] artists and arts administrators."[13] In collaboration with his partner, Bradley, Whyte also began plotting what he hoped would be more lucrative ventures, including publishing children's books and religious texts, literature that "*stays* in Print."[14] Whyte's creative and critical production remained prolific during this period. But in

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[10] Ron Whyte to Zelda Fichandler, 8 August 1979, Box 6, Folder "Correspondence 1978–1985," Ron Whyte Papers.

[11] Harold C. Cannon to Ron Whyte, 17 May 1983, Box 11, Folder "Correspondence 1985–1986," Ron Whyte Papers; "Proposal for a Sourcebook in American Theatrical History," Box 10, Folder "Correspondence 1983–1985," Ron Whyte Papers.

[12] Paula Terry to Ron Whyte, 29 August 1983, Box 10, Folder "Correspondence 1981–1985," Ron Whyte Papers.

[13] Ibid.

[14] List of Goals for 1983 by Ron Whyte and Paul William Bradley, Box 64, Folder "Unsorted Writings," Ron Whyte Papers.

an effort to secure access to nondebilitating prosthetics and to catch up on his perpetually overdue rent payments, a significant amount of his writing time was absorbed by crafting letters to medical professionals, government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional associations, and other sources of emergency relief funding. It is in this professional and economic context that Whyte delivered his lecture at the prosthetics conference in 1984. Just weeks later, he wrote to the Connecticut Division of Vocational Rehabilitation contesting their denial of his request for an accessible van for work purposes and documented the fact that he was still awaiting a decision about his request for accessible word-processing equipment.[15]

Prosthetic Disemployment

Andy Warhol was being an asshole. At least Ron Whyte thought so when the two artists crossed paths at a Soho gallery opening in the early 1970s. It's unclear what offense Warhol committed, another incident whose details have been lost to the historical record. But if Warhol had not behaved badly that fateful evening, Whyte—a queer and disabled playwright—might never have removed the "cosmetic glove" covering his "withered" left arm and hurled it at the visual artist, enabling the glove to make its own "contribution to modern art" (PLS 7). The famed artist, Whyte claimed, would go on to copy this assault by prosthesis in *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* (1973).[16]

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[15] Ron Whyte to Virginia Sanford, Connecticut Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, October 1984, Box 11, Folder "Correspondence," Ron Whyte Papers.

[16] Whyte's self-alleged prosthetic assault on Warhol was only one of many points of contact between these two artists' lives. Whyte's friend, neighbor, and frequent collaborator, Gregory Battcock, was a usual suspect at Warhol's factory, even starring as "the recipient" in *Eating Too Fast* (1966), the sequel to Warhol's *Blow Job* (1965). Warhol and Whyte were both guest artists at the 1984 National Very Special Arts Festival, which celebrated the tenth

However laughable, Whyte's attack on Warhol was hardly original. An ardent disciple of Valerie Solanas and her *SCUM Manifesto*, Whyte found himself in a complex chain of citation.[17] His assault evoked Solanas's shooting of Warhol at point-blank range in 1968, even if the rubbery faux flesh of his cosmetic hand proved a poor surrogate for her bullets.[18] It would be a stretch to accord Whyte's assault a place in radical disability activism analogous to what Sara Warner has called the "ludicrous" possibility that "had [Solanas] not shot Warhol there might not have been a radical feminist movement."[19] Yet this awkward assault became foundational to Whyte's own understanding of the political and theatrical projects for which prosthetics might be mobilized, even if those projects did not always necessitate prostheses going airborne.

To develop this argument, I begin by contextualizing Whyte's cosmetic glove within his own understanding of the theatricality of disabled embodiment and the history of prosthetic design. The cosmetic glove included some features that aspired to mimic a "real" hand and other features that were uninterested—to say the least—in faithfully replicating the real. These contradictory design qualities troubled the glove's position in the mutually imbricated projects of designing "lifelike" prosthetics and efforts to render physically disabled people employable through prosthetic intervention. I demonstrate how Whyte

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anniversary of Jean Kennedy Smith's disability arts organization (formerly National Committee, Arts for the Handicapped). Program for National Very Special Arts Festival, May 1984, Box 135, Folder "Various Associations: 1 of 3," Ron Whyte Papers.

[17] Class journal entry for C.E. j 393, Union Theological Seminary, 7 January 1976, Box 42, Folder "Journal: C.E. j 393," Ron Whyte Papers.

[18] Whyte claimed to have assaulted Warhol approximately ten to twelve years before the delivery of the lecture, placing the event sometime between 1972 and 1974, approximately four to six years after Solanas shot Warhol. PLS, 7.

[19] Sara Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 69.

celebrated his prosthetic hand in terms of the resolute artifice that made it appear both "fake" and "dead" (PLS 6). NTFDA publicity materials featured roboticist Mori's "uncanny valley" graphs, images that, like the encounters Whyte discusses in his lecture, betray phobic responses to prosthetics. But whereas his lecture documents encounters in which such phobia emerges because the "fake" hand appeared "dead," Mori's aversion to prosthetics derived from a discomfort with the possibility for prosthetics to appear "almost but not quite" real, almost but not quite "live."[20] Whyte's reasons for including Mori's graphs in a flyer for his organization are unclear. But through a close reading of Mori's graphs and writings about "the uncanny valley," I argue that Whyte derived from Mori an interest in the complicated intersections of disability, prosthetics, representation, theatricality, and liveness. During his 1984 lecture, Whyte elaborated an affective and political attachment to his prosthetic on the basis of its fakeness and deadness, rather than on the basis of its potential reality and liveness. In so doing, he theatrically staged the prosthetic's indeterminate animacy to contest the push toward employment in disability policy, while also staging it as a resource for his own work as a writer and performer in the context of the intensified social and economic precarity he experienced throughout the 1980s. With his cosmetic hand, then, Whyte staged prosthetic disemployment.

Prosthetic Designs

The cosmetic glove was not Whyte's only prosthesis. He had used lower-leg prosthetics since a double below-knee amputation during his senior year at San Francisco State College. But the glove was unusual. Unlike the prosthetic legs that—in combination with crutches or a wheelchair—facilitated Whyte's mobility, the glove did not approximate

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[20] I borrow the phrasing "almost but not quite" from Homi Bhabha's theorization of "the ambivalence of mimicry." Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 121–31, at 129.

the functional capacity of an unimpaired "organic" arm. It did not enable Whyte to grasp a pencil or type on a typewriter, for instance. Its purpose was to mask his foreshortened left arm, which featured two (formerly webbed) digits, and to imbue him with an ostensibly "normal" appearance. Whyte's own experience led him to understand prosthetics as imbuing disabled embodiment with a "theatrical" quality: "Disability itself has its theatrical aspects. . . . Artificial limbs are props, and yet no one really cares what they look like or whether their owners have been taught how to use them. For instance, my artificial legs are kind of a pink color—the color that in the crayon boxes is called flesh. Why? It's an unexamined esthetic choice."[21] Whyte was on to something.

Scholar and curator Katherine Ott has provocatively declared that "histories of prosthetics are probably better written by playwrights than historians."[22] Ott traces back to the Victorian period the emergence of verisimilitudinous prosthetics, artificial limbs designed to pass as believable surrogates for the limbs they replaced.[23] Ott's historicization works against narratives of technological determinism. She attributes the priority commonly allotted to "cosmetically acceptable" limbs over their functional but potentially unbecoming antecedents, such as split hooks, to a new "cultural dynamic of mimicry."[24] Stephen Mihm similarly locates the birth of "'life-like'" prosthetics in the mid- to late nineteenth century, ascribing this shift to the burdens of self-representation in "a society of strangers" initiated

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[21] Barbara Brotman, "Playwright Lends Insight into the Theater of the Disabled," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 March 1979, Box 83, Folder "Reviews," Ron Whyte Papers.

[22] Katherine Ott, "The Sum of Its Parts: An Introduction to Modern Histories of Prosthetics," in *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*, ed. Katherine Ott, David Serlin, and Stephen Mihm (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1–42, at 1.

[23] Ibid., 24.

[24] Ibid.

by urbanization and industrialization.[25] But Mihm clarifies that lifelike limbs were not reducible to a transformation in visual appearance and that “manufacturers spared no expense in producing artificial limbs that actually *moved* like real arms and legs.”[26] Middle-class consumers of prostheses may have been primarily concerned with the “concealment” of bodily difference, but companies regularly marketed artificial limbs by representing people at work with their prostheses prominently displayed: prostheses, Mihm argues, “functioned not as a means to conceal, but rather, as a means to ensure continued employment.”[27] Yet the possibility of producing prosthetics of unprecedented verisimilitude did not inaugurate a linear trajectory in which increasing aesthetic and functional lifelikeness would be held in mutual esteem. For Ott, the trajectory of prosthetic design since the nineteenth century is better understood in terms of oscillation than of development, arguing that it moved “from mimicry to modification and then to disassociation with the original.”[28] She continues: “Many prosthesis makers in the late twentieth century took a turn into visionary engineering, where parts replicated neither form nor function of the human body.”[29]

The cosmetic glove with which Whyte assaulted Warhol participated curiously in the history of prosthetic design as it concerned the intersecting issues of social passing and workforce participation. Whyte had received the glove, paid for by the Connecticut Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), as the result of “a routine amputee clinic checkup”

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[25] Stephen Mihm, “‘A Limb Which Shall Be Presentable in Polite Society’: Prosthetic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives*, ed. Ott et al., 282–99, at 286–7.

[26] Ibid., 284.

[27] Ibid., 292.

[28] Ott, 24–5.

[29] Ibid., 25.

during his time as a graduate student in playwriting at the Yale School of Drama (3). He had no desire to wear the glove—"they showed me one and I didn't like it"—but he felt compelled to accept it nonetheless (3). As Whyte informed the audience at the prosthetics conference, "If I did not want a cosmetic hand it was a sign that I did not want to be rehabilitated, and also that I was not coming to terms with my disability" (3). When Whyte accepted the glove he neither needed nor wanted, he played the role of the good patient, effectively positioning himself to make further claims upon the state agency. But he also forged an opportunity to eschew normative regimes of prosthetic intervention. He accepted the glove only on the condition that "they would prescribe that my set of legs raise me to six foot one," a height he had been working toward incrementally increasing, since his "original heig[ht] had been about 5 foot seven" (3). That Whyte proved successful in negotiating such a trade-off is evidence of his developing acumen for negotiating with medical authorities and state bureaucracies; but it also suggests that an inconsistent set of goals governed the distribution of prostheses. At the same time that physicians and rehabilitation professionals collaborated to provide Whyte with the cosmetic glove that was imagined to restore him to a corporeal norm he had never inhabited, they provided height-enhancing prosthetics committed to optimizing, rather than normalizing, his body.

Whyte recounts that his initial "negative reaction" subsided when he considered "the idea of finally having a left arm that was like my right arm" (3). His "misgivings" returned, however, when the arm was delivered (4). He describes the design choices that failed to invest the glove with its cosmetic promise: "It did not extend my arm to a length equal to my right arm, though the hand itself was as large as my right hand. So there I was with this shortened arm and this big hand with a zipper from the palm up to my elbow" (4). He later reveals a number of additional design elements that rendered the glove's artifice obvious.

Beyond being of insufficient length and having a visible zipper along the forearm, the glove was also yellowish in hue and rubbery in texture. Further bemusing, the glove, though largely uninterested in replicating the real, featured occasional bursts of verisimilitude (including "veins" and "finger[n]ails") in its design (5). Most notably, the yellow, rubber, foreshortened, and zippered glove was outfitted with a series of contoured grooves that suggested fingerprints.

By including fingerprints (and by extension, the capacity to produce them), the glove suggests an aspiration toward lifelike status. This particular aspiration indicates how the glove was entangled in a web of theatricality even before Whyte wore it. Disability theorist Ellen Samuels has described fingerprinting as a "fantasy of identification" imbued with the "imagined power to mark and control racial and disability identities."[30] Fingerprinting received its "first institutional claims to truth" not through scientific laboratories or courts of law, but in literature.[31] Michael Taussig also emphasizes the fingerprint in his efforts to unmake the imitation–contagion binary in James George Frazer's elaboration of "'sympathetic magic.'"[32] Taussig remarks:

> Through contact (contagion) the finger makes the print (a copy). But the print is not only a copy. It is also testimony to the fact that contact was made—and it is the combination of both facts that is essential to the use of fingerprinting by the police in detection and by the State in certifying identities.[33]

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[30] Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 2, 98.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 220.

[33] Ibid.

Reading Samuels and Taussig together proves the inclusion of fingerprints on Whyte's glove both predictable and perplexing. The grooves allowed the glove to appear to have the capacity to produce individualizing, identificatory traces. But the glove's grooves had no indexical relationship to Whyte's own fingerprints. In order for Whyte to use the cosmetic glove, he actually had to mask his own fingerprints with synthetically produced ones; that is, he had to cover his two digits with a mask mimicking a five-fingered faux hand he had never possessed. In so doing, the glove disclosed the artificial, even theatrical, construction of fingerprinting's "truth" at least as much as it colluded in occluding the production of that truth. The glove's gesture toward lifelike design through the provision of fingerprints—a technology of identification that emerges from the fictive and troubles the decidability of original and copy—becomes theatrical by further decoupling the fingerprint from its individuating and identificatory function. To what use, then, did the DVR want the glove to be put, and how did Whyte mobilize it otherwise?

Hopelessly Cosmetic

In 1984, Dr. Lawrence Friedman, Chair of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at SUNY Stony Brook, invited Whyte to deliver two "20 or 30 minute" talks addressing "the social implications of the amputee state and the importance of dress for the legless."[34] The textual remains of the talk considered here seem to indicate that Whyte responded to Friedman's first suggestion (if, indeed, he followed Friedman's guidelines at all). An abrupt conclusion and numerous editorial markings, including supplementary text typed between lines and in the margins, suggests that this text may well represent a

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[34] Dr. Lawrence Friedman to Ron Whyte, 24 June 1983, Box 117, Folder "Personal Notes," Ron Whyte Papers.

preliminary draft.[35] Even still, this provisional document proves a helpful resource for gleaning what—at least at one point during his process—Whyte felt it was prudent to share at the prosthetics conference.

The lecture featured a linear, biographical narrative, although Whyte occasionally interrupted this structure with asides that directly addressed his audience. Whyte began the lecture by identifying himself as "a BK [below-knee] double amputee" (PLS, 1). He told his audience that he had been born with multiple "congenital deformities" in "a predominantly Italian speaking" enclave of Black Eagle, Montana, and he provided an account of the various rehabilitative practices to which he had been subject in childhood, including homemade leg braces constructed by his father, a railroad machinist (1). Whyte swiftly integrated rehabilitative biography with educational biography, beginning with his experience in dance classes that led him to perform in recitals, invariably "dressed like a cowboy because the cow-boy chaps concealed the braces" (1). By the time he was a teenager, Whyte "walk[ed] without the braces," but at sixteen, a bus "ran over both [his] ankles," which led to him using a wheelchair for a year (2). Next, Whyte addressed his senior year at San Francisco State College, during which time he received his double below-knee amputation while living in the Moffitt Hospital of the University of California as an "EXPERIMENTAL patient, that is to say, a charity patient" (2). That same year, he was admitted to the Yale School of Drama to study playwriting, where he showed up "with thirty dollars to [his] name," having—he slyly admitted—not disclosed to the school that he now used a wheelchair (2). At this point in the lecture, Whyte introduced the subject of the cosmetic glove, which was the thematic focus of the rest of the talk.

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[35] I have not discovered any other drafts in Whyte's extensive papers.

Whyte addressed his receipt of the glove and his shifting attitudes toward it. Additionally, he recounted and sometimes reenacted scenarios in which he staged the alienating effects of the cosmetic glove's undecidable animacy.[36] The two primary scenarios Whyte performed were a heterosexual date and interviews with three job placement agencies. In light of observations by Robert McRuer, Julie Passanante Elman, and others regarding the mutually constitutive histories of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, Whyte's staging of both a date and a job interview in this narrative is perhaps unsurprising.[37] For this article, I am less interested in how Whyte, who primarily enjoyed affectionate and sexual relationships with men, staged these intersecting histories than in how he experimented with the prosthetic's indeterminate animacy in these scenarios in order to corroborate the cosmetic glove's availability for staging disemployment.

The (initially unwitting) audience for Whyte's experiments with the glove was "a girl in the [Yale] art school": renowned feminist visual artist-to-be Judith Bernstein (PLS, 3–4). Whyte began this section of his talk by addressing the design choices he made for the date, which included "wearing a long sleeved shirt" and selecting a "dark[ly] lighted restaurant" in order to obscure the glove's cosmetic shortcomings (4). He wanted to "pass for normal" for Bernstein (3). Upon meeting Whyte at the restaurant, Bernstein immediately asked about "that thing on [his] hand" (5). She subsequently grasped the hand, in Whyte's telling, and remarked that "it feels like rubber," prompting her to inquire if the glove is a joke and to declare that "it's awful" (5). Bernstein proved persistent in expressing her contempt for the

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[36] My interest in undecideable animacy is informed by Rebecca Schneider (following Fred Moten following John Donne) on the "inter(in)animate." See Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains*: *Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 7.

[37] McRuer, 1–32; Julie Passanante Elman, *Chronic Youth: Disability, Sexuality, and U.S. Media Cultures of Rehabilitation* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 1–28.

glove, but she also imagined the glove as a resource: "Give it here. I could [get a] bunch of these and use them in my sculpting class" (5).

Bernstein articulated her criticism of Whyte's glove in aesthetic and economic as well as medical terms, critical perspectives that sometimes intersected in her discussion and that she sometimes mobilized independently of one another. Initially, she appeared to be outraged that Whyte might have "wast[ed] [his] money on junk like this," before learning that the Connecticut DVR had paid—in Whyte's estimation, "maybe four hundred" dollars—for the glove (5). She redirected her outrage toward vocational rehabilitation counselors and diagnosed the situation accordingly: "Those people are crazy. It's a joke. I'm sorry. They're crazy. Don't tell them that, but they're really crazy" (6). The glove's aesthetic failures propelled Bernstein's incredulity about the state agency's misguided spending. She declared, "It feels creepy. It's a fake. It feels like it's dead. It looks like it's dead" (6). She found the glove's visual appearance so disconcerting that when Whyte removed the glove, she stuffed the prosthetic in her "big leather hand-bag" to hide it from the restaurant's waitstaff and other patrons (6). Whyte's removal of the glove allowed Bernstein to connect her aesthetic and economic critiques of the glove and to observe what she described as the glove's "dangerous" effects on Whyte's body. In response to an inquiry from Bernstein, Whyte reported that "the skin on my left hand and up my arm was unnaturall[y] puckered/pal[ish] white, wrinkled" (6). He explained to her subsequently that the glove had this effect after he had worn it for only thirty minutes.

Whyte and Bernstein experienced affective vacillations over the course of their exchange, which unfolded rapidly in a brief segment (less than three minutes) of the lecture. Bernstein entered the scene with "a small scream," which then became laughter as she began to catalog the flaws of the "ugly" and "expensive" glove, her incredulity for which she found herself constantly apologizing (5). Whyte initially seemed surprised that Bernstein did not like the glove and then was “moved from being hurt to being angry” as she rehearsed her voluminous criticisms of the prosthetic, although it is not clear with whom he was angry (6). The scene concluded with Whyte eventually confessing that he agreed with Bernstein’s perspectives on the glove: “It’s awful” (5).

It is difficult to discern Whyte’s tone in this scene, much less his reliability as a narrator. These difficulties are further compounded by the debatable sincerity of Whyte’s efforts to “pass for normal” when wearing the glove on his date with Bernstein (3). Whyte’s performance of the lecture would have thrown this already debatable sincerity further into doubt. By this point in the lecture, Whyte had already disclosed his own “negative reaction” to the glove because of its ludicrously unlifelike design. In so doing, he suggested the glove’s incompatibility with the project of passing. Furthermore, he identified the range of staging practices—“wearing a long sleeved shirt,” sitting in a dimly lit restaurant—required in order to distract attention from the glove itself (4). If passing with the glove was possible, it was so in certain highly calculated contexts: passing was not necessarily repeatable in other quotidian environments in which he might expect to encounter Bernstein. Given that Whyte also experienced physical disability in terms of his dual below-knee amputations, for which he used lower-extremity prostheses, the idea that a cosmetic glove would facilitate Whyte’s “pass[ing] for normal” seems like a compromised endeavor from the outset (3). It was a project in which Whyte would have been unlikely to have an earnest investment. And yet, time and again, Whyte insisted upon his desire to pass.

Whyte’s use of leg prostheses may not have been visibly apparent to Bernstein during their date or to the audience for the 1984 lecture in which the date was recounted. Whyte frequently dressed in a combination of leather and denim, the materials best able to withstand the daily wear and tear of his prosthetic embodiment. But he signified his physical disablement through the use of mobility aids such as crutches or a wheelchair. He preferred to be ambulatory through his use of crutches, but he used a wheelchair throughout at least part of his time at Yale, when his date with Bernstein purportedly transpired. A letter written the month after the prosthetics conference suggests that Whyte likely used a wheelchair at the time he delivered the lecture (a lecture that, remember, opens with Whyte discussing his amputation and his subsequent use of prosthetic legs). During the date, Whyte's wheelchair would have thwarted the project of passing, thereby tempering any hint of sincere interest in "pass[ing] for normal" (3). In terms of textual content, Whyte's lecture was only peripherally concerned with the question of his leg prostheses and mobility, a thematically appropriate subject for a conference dedicated to the subject of lower-extremity prosthetics. But Whyte's performance of the lecture would have visually signified his mobility impairment, as did his performance on the date he represents in the lecture. This contrast between the textual content of the lecture and Whyte's embodiment at the time of its delivery amplifies the pointedness of his perhaps unanticipated choice to focus on the cosmetic glove. This choice proves even more pointed in retrospect, given the bout of debilitating health problems he experienced as a result of ill-fitting leg prosthetics.

Whyte's ambivalent sincerity about his cosmetic glove's utility for the project of passing complicates efforts to discern the extent to which he wanted to document Bernstein's phobic responses to the prosthetic. But irrespective of Whyte's interest in indicting Bernstein's potential ableism, this scene rehearses Whyte's discovery of the different facets of the cosmetic glove that rendered it amenable for performing disemployment. For Whyte, the glove was not only a disciplinary mechanism that sought to normalize his embodiment and render him more employable; it was also a resource that allowed him to contest the imperative that he be employable. The cosmetic glove proved available for this type of political mobilization for at least two reasons. First, its aesthetic and functional failure: through his narration of his date with Bernstein, Whyte identifies this failure as a crisis of animacy, a failure not only to appear real but also to appear "live." Second, there was the potential utility of removing the glove to reveal the side effects of wearing it: sweat, wrinkling, discoloration. Such disclosure exposed the glove's harm to Whyte's "real" body. It also announced the glove's capacity to alienate both by being worn and by being removed. Whyte mobilized the glove accordingly, both in the lecture and in the quotidian performances that the lecture archived. He did so in order to perform disemployment—that is, to evade the performance of compulsory labor while nevertheless creating work opportunities that included the lecture itself.

The Uncanny Prosthetic

Bernstein's phobic response to Whyte's prosthetic hand anticipated Masahiro Mori's theory of "the uncanny valley." But whereas the artist's anxiety about Whyte's prosthetic stemmed from the glove's appearance as both "fake" and "dead," Mori's anxiety about prosthetics in general came from those that *almost* passed as real and "live." Whyte maintained some interest in Mori's theory. In the late 1970s, the National Task Force for Disability and the Arts featured Mori's graphic representations of "the uncanny valley" in its publicity materials.[38] The flyer featuring the graphs includes contact information for the NTFDA but nothing else about the organization. One side includes Mori's graphs, titled "Human reactions to imitation humans, or Masahiro Mori's Uncanny Valley" without

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[38] NTFDA Uncanny Valley document, n.d., Box 1, Folder "Correspondence 1970–1982, N.D.," Ron Whyte Papers. Both sides of the document, which is printed on 8½ × 11 cardstock, feature a banner with contact information for the National Task Force for Disability and the Arts.

annotation; the reverse includes images (with minimal commentary) of prosthetic technology from the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.[39] Viewed on its own, this piece of publicity does not readily suggest how the theory might pertain to issues of disability and work. Read alongside Whyte's lecture, however, Mori's idea of "the uncanny valley" provides valuable insight into how prosthetics became a resource for performing disemployment.

Media and technology theorist Jennifer Rhee identifies Mori's goal as promoting the design of "humanoid machines with which humans will want to interact[,] . . . robots that will not repel humans or cause them to feel uncomfortable."[40] First articulated during a roundtable in 1970 and later published in multiple venues throughout the decade, Mori's work, she argues, "has had significant influence in U.S. humanoid robotics; and recently . . . in discussions of human 'realism' in computer graphics and film and video game animation."[41] She attributes this revitalization of Mori's theory to new translations of his essay on the uncanny valley in 2005 and 2012, the latter of which, "translated by [roboticist Karl] MacDorman and technology writer Norri Kageki, is the first translation authorized by

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[39] Illustrations occupying the first two of three columns include drawings of artificial limbs designed by Ambroise Paré in 1579: "artificial legs designed principally for knights on horseback," an "iron hand," and an "artificial arm with a mechanism for bending the elbow." The third column features two additional images. The first of these, labeled "F. Lacroix et Fils, Paris, 1915," represents a man manufacturing artificial limbs. The second is a "walking shell for paraplegics," a "battery-powered . . . exoskeleton" capable of moving forward, backward, turning, and going up and down stairs with or without a human occupant, designed by mechanical engineers at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1976.

[40] Jennifer Rhee, "Beyond the Uncanny Valley: Masahiro Mori and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*?," *Configurations* 21.3 (2013): 301–29, at 304-5.

[41] Ibid., 302.

Mori."[42] In this chapter, I work from the 2012 translation, but I attend to a key difference between this translation and earlier versions to which Whyte would have had access.

Rhee usefully highlights how Mori's theory enacts a normativizing project that legislates narrow boundaries of the human. Mori obfuscates the historical, cultural, and otherwise contextual specificity through which those boundaries of the human are drawn. Rhee discusses the centrality of prosthetics and ideas of health and illness in that boundary-making practice that limits Mori's conception of the human. Yet Rhee eventually develops an optimistic interpretation of Mori's work, "offer[ing] an alternative reading of the uncanny valley as a site of entanglement—one that highlights and challenges constructed boundaries between human and nonhuman, as well as opens up these boundary-constructions for critical engagement and historicization."[43] I suspect that Whyte shared—by way of anticipation—some of Rhee's optimism; his turn to Mori's anxiety about prosthetics informed his understanding of the political projects for which the cosmetic glove might be mobilized.

Mori's theory of *the uncanny valley* proposes a positive correlation between spectators' affinity for a "human likeness" and the magnitude of that likeness's human likeness.[44] This correlation suddenly and drastically drops when that likeness's humanness breeches a certain threshold, with the resemblance to the human becoming disconcertingly lifelike, or uncanny, in appearance. Mori represented this theory visually, through a pair of graphs that charted the spectator's affinity for a likeness relative to the perceived humanness of that likeness. For example, the likenesses in the first of Mori's two graphs (Fig. 1) include, in ascending order

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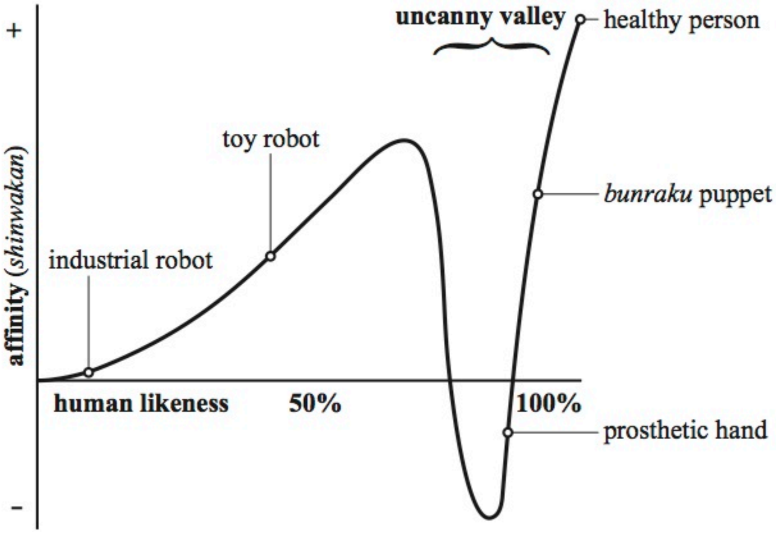
[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Mori, 98–9.

of human likeness: industrial robot, toy robot, prosthetic hand, *bunraku* puppet, and healthy person. Spectators' affinities for those likenesses exist in positive correlation with each likenesses' proximity to the human. But there is one noticeable exception: the prosthetic hand that appears near the gulf of the aforementioned uncanny valley. The accompanying text clarifies that the prosthetic hand to which the graph refers (and that proves uncanny) is "a realistic prosthetic hand," not the rubbery, yellowish, zippered variety that Whyte received.[45]

FIGURE 1
MASAHIRO MORI'S UNCANNY VALLEY (STATIC).
Source: Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Spectrum*, 12 June 2012, *http://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/the-uncanny-valley*



Mori's attention to the prosthetic hand did not invent the centrality of disability to understandings of the uncanny. Disability already figured squarely in accounts of the uncanny by Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud earlier in the twentieth century, accounts upon which Mori unevenly (if implicitly) draws in his writing. Jentsch discussed "the

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[45] Ibid., 99.

uncanny effect of epileptic fits, and of manifestations of insanity."[46] Freud's corrective to Jentsch's reading of the uncanny focused on the threat of blindness.[47] In general, Mori's take on the uncanny approximates Jentsch's concept more closely than it does Freud's. Jentsch, like Mori, identified the uncanny as a crisis of animacy, of "'doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate.'"[48] Also like Jentsch, and in contrast to Freud, Mori appears uninterested in legislating the distinction between uncanny effects in everyday life and uncanny effects in representational practices such as literature (Jentsch) or *bunraku* puppet theatre (Mori). But Mori's understanding of the uncanny departed from both of these antecedents in its normativizing and universalizing assumptions about the encounter between the spectator and the likeness. For example, both Jentsch and Freud account for potential differences among spectators encountering the uncanny. In Freud's understanding, Jentsch emphasized that "people vary so very greatly in their sensitivity to this quality of feeling" (the uncanny).[49] And Freud acknowledged that the uncanny was not an inherent property of a double but instead was relationally produced through an encounter between the double and a spectator at a particular stage of development. Rhee critiques Mori's assumptions about what figures as uncanny (and for whom it does so) by pointing out how his ideas decouple encounters with the uncanny from history. She highlights, for instance, how that which initially seems uncanny might become less uncanny through familiarity achieved through repeated

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[46] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), 17: 217–52, at 226.

[47] Ibid., 227-230.

[48] Ibid., 226.

[49] Ibid., 220.

exposure. The term *shinwakan*, translated as "affinity" in the 2012 translation of the uncanny valley essay Mori approved, had previously been translated to mean "familiarity."[50] The graphs Whyte reproduced on the NTFDA's publicity materials adhere to this earlier translation.[51] As translations and representations of Mori's graph were circulated in the 1970s, they articulated a narrow vision of what constituted the human. They did so by depicting familiarity with the prosthetic hand as static and predetermined, and the spectator as unable to anticipate a moment in the future in which she might enjoy greater familiarity with disability.[52] Perhaps unsurprisingly, "handicapped people" also appear in the uncanny valley of earlier iterations of the graph, albeit with greater distance from the valley's basin than the prosthetic hand.[53]

Mori's theory does more than extend associations of the uncanny with physical, intellectual, and psychosocial difference. It instantiates a peculiar manifestation of ableism, here represented by the assumption that ill, disabled, and prosthetic bodies are to be regarded as inferior to and less desirable than their healthy, nondisabled, and "organic" counterparts. Consider, for example, how Mori's graph accords the prosthetic hand a high degree of human likeness but a low level of affinity (locating it in the valley), whereas the "healthy person" enjoys the highest degree of human likeness and the greatest level of affinity. The "healthy person" is the human likeness that transgresses "likeness" and *becomes* the human rather than resembling the human or being proximal to it. Here, Mori reproduces

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[50] Rhee, 311.

[51] NTFDA Uncanny Valley document, n.d., Box 1, Folder "Correspondence 1970–1982, N.D.," Ron Whyte Papers.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

ableist assumptions about the proximities of health and life, evoking not only Jentsch's identification of the discernment of animacy as the problem of the uncanny, but also Mel Chen's more recent assertion that "humans stereotyped as passive, such as people with cognitive or physical disabilities," have been among those imagined outside of "the calculus of animacy."[54] Mori's theory of the uncanny valley both assumes a universalizing spectatorial norm that erases differences among spectators and depends upon indifference toward the likeness's relationship to representation. This flattens out differences between likenesses that stand in for the human and likenesses that *are* human. Yet in light of the place of the prosthetic hand in Mori's graph, this indifference toward the likeness's representational status might more aptly be described as a kind of ambivalent theatricalism. Let me explain.

Mori's graphs seek to describe the disconcerting eeriness produced by nonhuman likenesses that too closely mimic the human without exactly dissolving the human–likeness divide. But these graphs also attempt to illuminate the pleasures produced when nonhuman likenesses, such as the toy robot, substitute for the human. These graphs are completely uninterested in legislating between uncanny effects in the everyday (a child's encounter with a seemingly animate doll) and uncanny effects in cultural production (the seemingly animate puppet in theatrical performance). The likenesses that figure in Mori's graphs include not only "nonhuman" human likenesses (the toy robot) but also "human" human likenesses (the healthy person). I have no interest in reinscribing the divide between the representational and the real that Mori erases, but I do wish to highlight how this indifference toward distinguishing between human likeness understood to *be* human and human likeness

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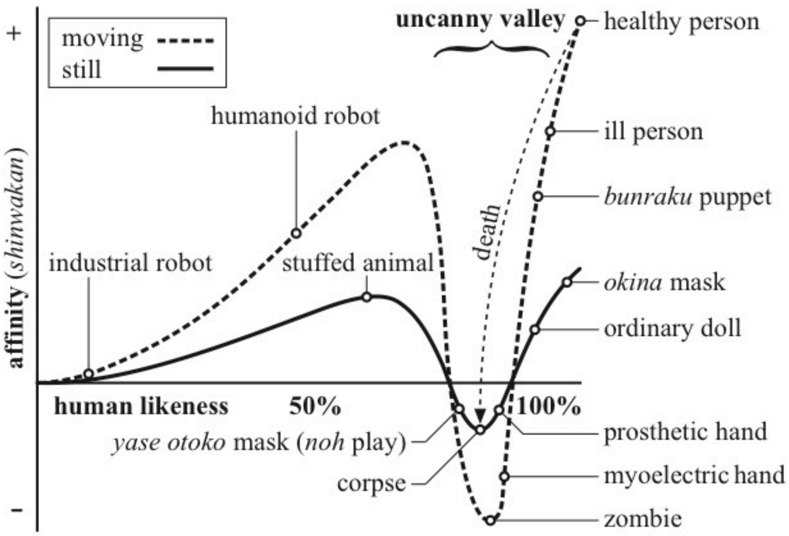
[54] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 3.

understood to be *playing* human frustrates efforts to think about the likenesses that populate his graphs in terms of representation.

FIGURE 2
MASAHIRO MORI'S UNCANNY VALLEY (WITH MOVEMENT).
Source: Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley,"trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Spectrum*, 12 June 2012, *http://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/the-uncanny-valley*.



Turning to the second graph (Fig. 2) clarifies the relationship between disability and Mori's indifference toward the status of representation in his written and visual accounts of the uncanny valley. This graph depicts the differences between the uncanny effects of static likenesses and likenesses in motion. Like the first graph, this one includes some likenesses that are given to be playing at the human (the toy robot, the *bunraku* puppet), whereas other likenesses are given to *be* human. But even more so than its antecedent, this graph legislates the distinction between likenesses that *represent* the human and likenesses that *are* human primarily with regard to health and ability status. For example, it includes the likeness "ill person," which achieves greater human likeness and greater spectatorial affinity than the prosthetic hand but fails in both counts when compared to the "healthy person." Even if we concede Mori's claim that health status necessarily impacts spectators' perceptions of human likenesses (and, by extension, their affinity for them), the question of representation remains. Mori's graph is unable to account for the distinction between an ill person and an ill character represented by an actor, much less the distinctions among an ill character represented by a "healthy" actor, an ill character represented by an ill actor, or a healthy character represented by an ill actor whose health status signifies in excess of that of her character.

The graphs mobilize health and ability in order to articulate the boundaries of the human. They also convene likenesses from different representational registers and, for many of the likenesses, obfuscate the conventions that enable spectators to apprehend a given likeness as human (or not). For example, Mori assumes that spectators' encounters with *bunraku* puppets happen "in the theater" when "we are seated at a certain distance from the stage."[55] He continues, "The puppet's absolute size is ignored, and its total appearance, including hand and eye movements, is close to that of a human being. So, given our tendency as an audience to become absorbed in this form of art, we might feel a high level of affinity for the puppet."[56] We might approach this description of *bunraku* performance and spectatorial conventions with some trepidation. But for Mori, the puppet's proximity to humanness and spectators' attendant experiences of absorption and feelings of "affinity" occur despite the fact that the puppet's "realism in terms of size, skin texture, and so on, does not even reach that of a realistic prosthetic hand."[57] This affinity is enabled, his remarks suggest, by repeated, conventionalized exposure to the puppet in the context of theatre spectatorship. Yet when Mori asserts that "many of our readers have experience interacting

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[55] Mori, 99.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

with persons with physical disabilities, and all must have felt sympathy for those missing a hand or leg and wearing a prosthetic limb," he does not similarly situate the prosthetic in a particular context or relative to a particular spectatorial convention.[58] Furthermore, he writes that people experience an "eerie sensation" upon discovering the artificiality of prosthetics with a "degree of resemblance" to organic body parts.[59] The former statement assumes that Mori's readers and, by extension, the spectators he imagines, are nondisabled. The latter statement assumes that encounters with prosthetic embodiment are isolated occurrences, that the "eerie sensation" never dissipates through repeated acquaintance with or even intimacy with the prosthetic. As Rhee notes, "Neither Mori's uncanny valley theory nor his recommendations to roboticists differentiates between initial encounters with humanoid figures and prolonged interactions with them."[60] By evacuating the encounter with the prosthetic hand of any specific spatial, temporal, historical, or cultural framework, Mori represents his normative construction of the prosthetic's affect as merely descriptive of an enduring ontological truth. Wherever spectators encounter the prosthetic hand, it is certainly not onstage, and it is inevitably alienating in effect.

The prosthetic hand's indeterminate representational status thwarts Mori's attempt to use health and ability as viable orientations for legislating the distinction between the human and the nonhuman. The prosthetic hand is both a hand and material that purports to be a hand other than the hand that it is. The ambiguity of the prosthetic's representational status might seem less exceptional when we return to the question of theatre and

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[58] Ibid., 98.

[59] Ibid., 99.

[60] Rhee, 305.

performance. Might the prosthetic hand be like any other hand "in the theater," where "a [hand] is a [hand] pretending to be another [hand]"?[61]

The uncanny valley's revulsion toward signs of disability and its inability to account for the labor of representation—disabled or otherwise—makes it a curious artifact for the NTFDA to include in its publicity materials.[62] Perhaps the earlier translation of *shinwakan* as "familiarity" prompted Whyte to embrace theatrical representation as a method for extending humanity to disabled people. Perhaps in their efforts to develop work opportunities for artists with disabilities, Whyte and his colleagues identified Mori and his writings as political targets. Perhaps they hoped to denaturalize some of Mori's assumptions through their programming and activism concerning disabled artists in history. Whyte's hopelessly cosmetic glove was a far cry from the realistic prosthetics that informed Mori's theorization of the uncanny valley. What, then, of the prosthetic hand that makes no attempt to pass, even visually and texturally insisting upon its status as prosthetic? Reading the uncanny valley in tandem with the 1984 lecture suggests how Whyte mobilized anxieties about the prosthetic's animacy in order to perform disemployment.

Disemploying Prosthetics

Whyte addressed his cosmetic hand more explicitly in terms of work in the second half of his lecture, when he discusses his use of the glove to mine unnerving spectatorial encounters. He regarded such encounters not as problems that interfered with his ability to work, but as opportunities through which he might strategically resist the new tethering of

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[61] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 20. States paraphrases Peter Handke: "In the theater light is brightness pretending to be other brightness, a chair is a chair pretending to be another chair."

[62] Available archival evidence is unable to account for what drove Whyte to reference Mori's theory in his organization's materials.

disability to the labor market. When he accepted the DVR's glove, he agreed to wear it occasionally as instructed, "for…business, when I have to look normal" (PLS, 8). In recounting his date with Judith Bernstein, Whyte had already established the glove's failure to imbue him with anything approximating a "normal" corporeality. Thus, the professional scenario in which it would behoove Whyte to don the glove would be a peculiar one indeed, wherein "one simply did want to look disabled, but it was guaranteed no one would be likely to grab your hand" (9).

Unable to identify such a scenario, Whyte embarks upon an improvisatory research project approximately one month prior to his delivery of the lecture. Part ethnography, part performance art, part Boalian invisible theatre, he "dug out [his] cosmetic hand, put on a clean shirt…and a tie, and hit the streets" so that he could "run a few little surveys" (9). Whyte costumed himself not just as a job seeker but as a government administrator responsible for conducting similar surveys. Dressed to deliver a protean performance, he attended a series of interviews at job placement agencies, where he represented himself as "seeking employment in publishing as a copy editor" (10). As his description of these experiences proceeds, Whyte slips from first-person narration to scripted dialogue with "Miss X," the name he assigns to the composite figure of the women with whom he interviewed (10). During his lecture, Whyte theatrically represents his interview experience across his own body, which was visually marked as disabled through his use of mobility aids: playing himself playing the DVR administrator playing the interviewer, a palimpsest of cross-class, cross-gender, and ostensibly cross-ability representation.

These interviews would begin pleasantly enough. But when things were "going along just fine," Whyte would pause to "level with" the interviewer and disclose that he had an "artificial hand" (10). Then he would prompt the interviewer with a question: "It looks almost real, doesn't it?" (10). Miss X would assure him that "it won't interfere with [his] job performance" (11). At this point, Whyte would disclose his need to "take off the cosmetic hand and let my real hand and arm dry out" on account of the sweat that wearing the glove produced (11). In so doing, Whyte both rendered apparent the damaging effects of the prosthetic upon the real (something that he had represented earlier in the lecture as having driven Bernstein's own frustrations with the glove) and introduced the glove's ability to spark anxiety about prosthetic hygiene as exceeding the limits of accommodations for disabled workers.

Whyte senses that the composite Miss X is uncomfortable with his need periodically to remove the cosmetic glove from his withered arm. Her discomfort derives both from the visibility and the duration of the prosthetic undress—Whyte needs to "let it air out for about ten minutes" (12). He responds by promising discretion, offering to perform this task "in the bathroom" and, when possible, to have this act of self-care coincide with his scheduled coffee and lunch breaks (12). Miss X pauses and "MAKES SOME CALCULATIONS ON A PIECE OF PAPER," apparently concerned about the hour per day of work time that he would lose when away from his desk (12). Whyte volunteers his willingness to perform the task at his workstation. Miss X responds simply, "Umm, no" (13). She refocuses the conversation on the issue of precedent, inquiring about how he has negotiated these needs in prior workplace environments. Whyte reminds her that there is no precedent to speak of because he has "never worked in an office before" and proceeds to discuss his commitment to "wear[ing] the hand" (13). "It will improve my chances of getting a job," Whyte informs her, on account of the fact that "my real hand is somewhat unpleasant" (13).

When Miss X continues to express her concerns about Whyte "being away from [his] desk a full hour every day," he offers another alternative: "I really have to wear SOMETHING, you know, some sort of prosthetic device. I could get a hook" (13). Whyte knew, of course, that his interviewer would find the prospect of him switching from a cosmetic hand to a functional hook even more alienating (and thus, even less viable) than the accommodations he had already suggested. Miss X ignores Whyte's suggestion about the hook and instead asks if he could "put air-holes or something in that hand" (13). Her recommendation highlights the inadequacy of the DVR-supplied prosthetic while at the same time suggesting that it was Whyte's responsibility to intervene upon its profoundly unlifelike design in order to make his bodily difference palatable to his coworkers. Miss X never mentions the possibility that a nonfunctional prosthetic might be superfluous, or that the DVR should be responsible for providing better prosthetics, or that the onus for acclimating to the withered arm be placed on his potential coworkers instead of on Whyte himself. Whyte concludes by feigning surprise that he had not heard back from any of the jobs to which he applied. Whyte's lecture evidenced the expansive network of discourses and practices—from vocational rehabilitation to prosthetic design to banal workplace ableism—that colluded to make prosthetic embodiment both compulsory and impossible. But the lecture's significance goes beyond exposing the incommensurability of efforts to usher disabled Americans into the labor market and the resources allocated to support these efforts. Whyte's lecture contested compulsory labor as disability's political horizon, paradoxically through his work as a playwright and performer. His theatrical staging of the cosmetic glove both to avoid work and to enact work is a performance of disemployment.

Whyte pursued disemployment through theatrical performance, which was both the medium of his lecture and its subject matter. He played multiple characters, including Judith Bernstein, Miss X, and various iterations of himself. By inhabiting these roles, he recounted and reenacted scenes purporting to reflect "real" biographical experiences, the veracity of which we might approach with some skepticism. He also staged tension between how his body signified disability (through his use of mobility aids) and the site of disabled embodiment upon which the text of his lecture was focused (his cosmetic glove). Furthermore, the cosmetic glove was theatrical in its own right. It was resolute in its artifice, both visually and haptically, complete with fingerprints no more likely to index the identity of Whyte, to whom it belonged, than anyone else who might elect to wear it. Importantly for Whyte (and disconcertingly for Bernstein, Miss X, and others whom he encountered), the glove's artifice made it appear not only "fake" but also "dead."

By embracing the glove's dubious representational status as well as its crisis of animacy, Whyte ensured that he would be interpreted as unhireable. In so doing, he highlighted the glove's inadequacy for fulfilling the DVR's goal of facilitating access to employment. Through Whyte's theatrical manipulation of its aesthetic and functional shortcomings, the cosmetic glove not only failed to facilitate his employability, it actively impeded it. Whyte's commitment to the glove's artifice and its debatable animacy was not limited to interviews with job placement agencies. He took the cosmetic glove's failure to facilitate employment and put it to work. His performance of the lecture amplified and otherwise extended the unseemly qualities already inherent to the glove. In so doing, Whyte entrepreneurialized his prosthetic embodiment and his rejection of work *through* that very prosthetic embodiment.

It is unclear whether Whyte received a fee for his delivery of the lecture at the conference, though a modest stipend would not have been unusual for such a talk.[63] The lecture depended upon Whyte's labor as a playwright and a performer, to be sure, but it also represented a new stage in his career arc as an expert of disability experience; that is, as a

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[63] This information is not available in the archive.

professional disabled person. Whyte had previously served in similar capacities through his administrative labor for the National Endowment for the Arts and the HEW (to say nothing of his own NTFDA). Notably, this development unfolded during a point in his career when he experienced an intensification of his already chronic economic and social precarity. His ability to attend rehearsals and keep up with script rewrites was compromised by the leg prosthetics that were intended to facilitate his mobility. His 1984 lecture was not exceptional, but one of the many writing/performance practices to which he turned in order to negotiate this new reality.

Through his performance of the lecture, Whyte both documented his rejection of work and entrepreneurialized this refusal. This is the performance of disemployment. He also marked performance *as* disemployment, perhaps anticipating (with a particularly crip inflection) a suspicion that Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider share: that "the 'not not' work of theatre and its production of subjectivities [might] offer productive (or unproductive) ways of thinking about changes in the nature of work, its place in the life of the present, and its relation to futurity."[64] Whyte's performance of disemployment similarly anticipates recent inquiries in queer and feminist disability studies that have approached with trepidation the reduction of disability politics to a concern with access to employment opportunities. Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow challenge modes of activism that are contingent upon disabled people affirming their desire to "work if only reasonable accommodations were granted."[65] Instead, they champion a disability politics that contests the economic violence disabled people are subject to in times of state austerity: "Fuck

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[64] Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction," *TDR* 56.4 (2012): 5–9, at 6.

[65] Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow, "Introduction," in *Sex and Disability*, ed. Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 1–34, at 32.

employability."[66] Whyte's performance of disemployment falls short of this more radical activist sentiment. Indeed, his simultaneous disavowal and embrace of work offers a paradoxical synthesis of the activist discourses McRuer and Mollow identify. Performances of disemployment nevertheless afforded Whyte an opportunity to survive and contest the precarity to which disabled Americans in the late twentieth century were increasingly subject.

Bureaucratic Drag

In the summer of 1973, Ron Whyte tendered his resignation from a post he never held. He submitted a memorandum to his next door neighbor, Gregory Battcock, the "Chancellor" and "Director of the Oceanic Institute" at Onassis University, a university that did not – indeed, *could not* – employ either of them.[67] Outside of their correspondence, Onassis University did not exist. Even still, Whyte writes to his fictive superior:

> [D]espite my tenure, not to mention my affection for Onassis University, I must here tender my resignation from my official post, whatever it is;---I can no longer in all fair conscience continue to accept my salary. (I would, however, appreciate the right to retain the position of Honorary Dean of whatever it is that I am the Dean of, here, at Onassis University)[…]I herewith tender my resignation. Being a member of the faculty of Onasis University has been immensely rewarding and enriching. Though I was never certain (exactly, you understand) what my function was, I assure you I enjoyed whatever it was that I did here at O.U.[68]

Whyte concludes the memorandum by attaching a litany of titles to his signature: "Playwrite; Memb. N.Y. State C. of the Arts; Anarchist; Totally Disabled Person; Genius."[69]

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Dean Whyte to G. Battcock, Box 110, Folder "Unmarked," Ron Whyte Papers.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

Within the context of a letter otherwise rife with impostures, this signature is surprisingly felicitous[70]: Whyte *really was* a double, and later, triple amputee, as well as a prolific playwright whose work, including consulting work for the NYSCA, the NEA, and HEW, would eventually place him at the vanguard of national conversations about disability, performance, and work from the 1970s until his death in 1989. Given this, what are we to make of Whyte (dis)occupying the role of a faux dean submitting a faux memorandum to a faux chancellor at a faux university, all in the name of quitting a job he did not have?

The significance of Whyte's mock resignation becomes clearer when we consider it within the broader project of which it was part, a durational epistolary performance project produced by a collaboration of disabled and queer artists from 1972 to 1977.[71] During these years, Ron Whyte joined Gregory Battcock, a freelance art critic and gossip columnist also on faculty at William Paterson College, and John George, on staff at the London-based *Art & Artists* magazine, in assuming the identities of bureaucrats at a range of fictive enterprises. In addition to Onassis University, these fictive sites included a mental health-counseling center for "homosexuals" and not one, but two, separate airlines. On behalf of these enterprises, they produced an elaborate archive of infelicitous documents: memoranda, incorporation papers, human resources flowcharts, professional certifications, job offer letters, and marketing surveys. They plotted hooding ceremonies for the occasion of

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[70] I use "felicitous" in the Austinian sense. See J.L. Austin, "Lecture II." In *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 12-24.

[71] To my knowledge neither Gregory Battcock nor John George identified as disabled, although Battcock developed something of a disability consciousness and participated on the board of NTFDA. Moreover, as I will demonstrate, this epistolary performance project was interested in exploring the imbrications of queer history and disability history with regards to both work and psychiatric power.

awarding honorary doctorates from Onassis University.[72] On the stationary for the mental health counseling center, they threatened to have one another committed to psychiatric institutions.[73] And in one especially peculiar exchange, they worked to orchestrate a merger between their two fictive airlines: the Trans-Atlantic Alternative and Gay World Air.[74] Throughout their correspondence, Whyte and Battcock posed not only as university administrators, but as religious clergy, mental health professionals, airline executives, and on more than one occasion, they even posed as one another. Yet they rarely evince even a passing interest in matching the professional roles in which they posed with the fictive enterprises on whose behalf they purported to write. Battcock variously signed his correspondence "Dr. G.," "Gregory Braniff," and "Braniff Livingston, Esquire." Whyte's epistolary identities shifted primarily in terms of his accumulation and disposal of post-nominal titles: he signs one 1975 letter to Battcock, "Ron Whyte, M.Div. (in progress), L.D. (Legally Disabled), V.C. (Vicious Cripple), D.H.G.P (Dear Heart–Gentle Person) (in progress)."[75]

The correspondence comprising this epistolary performance is eclectic and even willfully inconsistent in many respects. But the documents Whyte, Battcock, and George produced are consistent in one regard: their concern with the subject of employment. In this section, I argue that this performance not only constitutes an early example from the broader

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[72] Gregory Battcock to Ron Whyte, "Investiture Ceremony for Special Convocation," 20 May 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, Gregory Battcock papers, 1958-1982, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter Gregory Battcock papers).

[73] Gregory Battcock to Ron Whyte, Box 108, Folder "Unmarked," Ron Whyte Papers.

[74] "Chancellor G" (Gregory Battcock) to "Maleva" (John George), 26 February 1973, Box 4, Folder 19, Gregory Battcock papers, 1958-1982.

[75] Ron Whyte to Dr. G (Gregory Battcock), 14 May 1975, Box 108, Folder "Project 2 of 2," Ron Whyte Papers.

repertoire of disemployment, but more specifically, as the performance of "bureaucratic drag." Considering this epistolary collaboration alongside a separate, but sometimes overlapping, archive of correspondence illuminates the utility of "bureaucratic drag" as a paradigm. This correspondence catalogues the physical and economic violence Whyte experienced in conjunction with his efforts to secure government resources on the basis of his disability. More often than not, this meant his efforts to secure (well fitting) prosthetic legs funded through vocational rehabilitation offices. These two sites of bureaucratic engagement differ considerably from one another. The epistolary collaboration offers a playful, often campy enthrallment with bureaucracy's material remains. The latter elaborates a polemical indictment of state violence against disabled people. These two engagements with bureaucracy are further distinguished in terms of the bureaucratic figures that populate their respective pages. Whyte, Battcock, and George may have demonstrated protean capacities with regards to the range of bureaucratic impostures they adopted, but state functionaries – the anonymous bureaucrats derided in Whyte's personal correspondence – do not even make cameo appearances within the epistolary performance project.

These two sites of bureaucratic engagement shed light upon one another when they are examined relative to two dominant discourses of disability in the 1970s. This period witnessed intensifying efforts to usher disabled Americans into the labor market: a series of policy, medical, rehabilitative, and cultural practices and discourses all interested in the project of making disabled Americans employable. This shift toward employability was bolstered in large part by an anxious companion discourse: that of the disability fraud. The pairing of widespread economic precarity and anti-welfare sentiments reanimated earlier (but never dormant) suspicions that nondisabled people were abusing welfare resources by feigning impairment in order to avoid work and secure access to resources they did not deserve.[76] Ellen Samuels ties the proliferating anxieties about disability fraudulence to the "gains of the disability rights movement" more broadly, noting that such advancements "produced a resurgence of cultural suspicions of disabled people and a proliferation of required 'proofs' of disabled status."[77] Whyte's epistolary collaboration registers this renewed commitment to proof, to government documents and other textual practices of marking and securing disability identity, what Samuels calls "fantasies of identification," within the late twentieth century.[78] His creative and critical engagements with bureaucracy addressed the subject of work, certainly, but he realized this thematic engagement with employment through a methodological interest in the power – and failure – of the document.

My adoption of the term "bureaucratic drag" is informed by the fact that Whyte, Battcock, and George's epistolary collaboration so frequently embrace the cusp of failure to which the bureaucratic document is always pitched. The subject of failure and its imbrications with power has loomed large within the recent resurgence of critical attention to bureaucracy. Intellectual historian Ben Kafka narrates "[t]he story of 'bureaucracy' – all of our jokes, anecdotes, complaints, even our occasional stories of triumph" as "a story of this desire that is not reducible to a need or demand. It is the story of how paperwork, even when it works, fails us. We never get what we want."[79] Anthropologist David Graeber quips that Max Weber and Michel Foucault were "the only two intelligent human beings in twentieth century history who honestly believed that the power of bureaucracy lies in its

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[76] For a critique of efforts to articulate a boundary between the authentic disabled subject and the disability fraud, see Samuels, "The Disability Con Onsreen," 66-79.

[77] Samuels, 10.

[78] Ibid., 2.

[79] Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone, 2012), 78.

effectiveness."[80] As I develop the concept, "bureaucratic drag" signals at least doubly, both what proves so relentlessly objectionable about bureaucracy as well as – for Whtye and his collaborators at least – a sense of its peculiar pleasures.

Bureuacratic drag figures as a theatrical relation. Whyte, Battcock, and George posed as various bureaucrats within and through their correspondence, with "drag" signaling the sense of campy roleplay with a confused investment in the project of passing. Bureuacratic drag also figures as a temporal relation, a kind of caricature that critically exacerbates the inertia popularly attached to, even coextensive with, bureaucracy itself. Lines at government offices get longer and longer. Documents are Xeroxed in triplicate, only to have every copy misfiled. Meetings are called to set meetings, which are then endlessly deferred; and when they do happen, they go over time. For (Ben) Kafka and others, bureaucracy's temporality, its "chronic deferrals and displacements," both constitutes failure and "[presents] unmistakable opportunities for resistance […] through everyday strategies of deferral and displacement."[81] I subsume bureaucracy's various sluggish maneuvers under the rubric of "drag" advisedly. Scholars in theatre and performance studies and queer studies (often following various modes of postcolonial critique) have long thought about the imbrications of drag's temporal and theatrical significations. Rebecca Schneider is particularly instructive in this regard, as her polemical declaration that "performing remains" convenes not only the (temporal) drag of the past upon the present, the (theatrical) drag of mimetic representation as being the condition of rather than an exception within repertoires of embodied behavior

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[80] David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (New York and London: Melville House, 2015), 55.

[81] Kafka, 73-4.

and action, but also as a sense of drag's orientation toward failure (or, more often in Schneider's parlance, "error," or, following Tavia Nyong'o, "mistake.")[82]

The tedium, deferrals, and durations that define bureaucratic encounters are so excruciating that one would be hard pressed to make an argument for more bureaucracy. Still, we would do well to question, as does Shannon Jackson, "models of political engagement that measure artistic radicality by its degree of anti-institutionality."[83] As Jackson notes, such engagement risks "unthinkingly echo[ing] a routinized language of anti-institutionalism and anti-statism" which can lead to "unexpectedly colluding with neoliberal impulses that want to dismantle public instiutions of human welfare."[84] However incendiary Whyte's critiques of state disability practices may have been, the way he contested the valorization of work suggests we understand him as calling for more robust sustaining social institutions, rather than their dissolution. Perhaps it is for this reason that government bureaucrats were conspicuously absent from the epistolary performance project. Whyte and his collaborators tempered what might otherwise have been gross, polemical critiques of the state, and also refused any efforts to clearly demarcate the private from the public within the context of an increasingly neoliberalized organization of the state and its delivery of services in the 1970s. In the pages that follow, I show how this epistolary performance project enacted a prescient critique of the new alignment of disability, performance, and work in the United States. First, I attend to Whyte and his collaborators' enactment of bureaucratic drag,

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[82] Rebecca Schneider, "Foreword–By Way of Other Directions." In *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1-31, at 17.

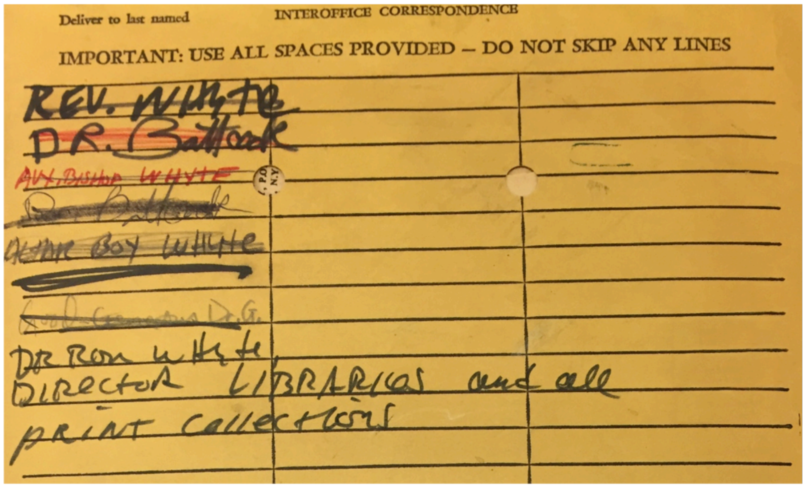
[83] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Arts, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 14.

[84] Ibid., 16.

and second, I contextualize this enactment within Whyte's critiques of bureaucratic drag, of bureaucracy's lethargic pace.

The scene of bureaucratic drag was was always concerned with the subject of work. Consider, for example, an inter-office manila envelope from the State of New Jersey that Battcock likely pilfered from William Paterson College, where he taught art history (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3.
MANILA INTER-OFFICE ENVELOPE EXCHANGED BETWEEN WHYTE AT BATTCOCK.
Source: Box 5, Packet 3. Gregory Battcock papers, 1958-1982. Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution.



Deliver to last named

INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

IMPORTANT: USE ALL SPACES PROVIDED – DO NOT SKIP ANY LINES

REV. Whyte
~~DR. Battcock~~
~~ArchBishop WHYTE~~
~~Dr Battcock~~
~~Altar Boy Whyte~~
~~God Commander D.G.~~
DR Ron Whyte,
DIRECTOR LIBRARIES and all
PRINT Collections

If the inscriptions upon the envelope are to be trusted, Whyte and Battcock used the envelope as a vehicle for their correspondence, likely shuttling documents across the corridor that separated their adjacent apartments. The inscriptions enumerate titles assigned to various addressees – different iterations of Whyte and Battcock themselves – in such a way that demonstrates the epistolary project's continued commitment to the subject of employment. They represent Whyte as experiencing a promotion, a demotion, and finally, a career change within a brief period of correspondence. He is initially listed as "Reverend Whyte," but then becomes "Archbishop Whyte," then "Altar Boy Whyte," and at last, "Dr. Ron Whyte, Director [of] Libraries and all print Collections." (It is not incidental, moreover, that through this career change, Whyte essentially becomes an archivist). In addition to thematizing the subject of employment, these textual inscriptions draw our attention to the means by which Whyte and Battcock's correspondence entered into circulation. By extension, then, it also indicates the broader repertoire of embodied practices required for producing and managing their epistolary performance. Typewriters were stolen.[85] Stationary was forged. Envelopes were stuffed. Letters were read and then – depending on who received them – lost, carefully filed, or destroyed.

This emphasis on embodied practices is central for understanding bureaucratic drag as performance. The quotidian choreographies of producing and managing their correspondence, as in their incessant references to the labor of procuring and producing stationary, are (besides work) the most prominent themes within the correspondence. Whyte, Battcock, and George eagerly plotted schemes to guarantee their project's iterative renewal, its bureaucratic drag, as documents beget documents beget documents. With excessive sincerity, they describe their curiosity, even wonder, about the processes that enable a letter to journey not only across the corridor, but in the case of correspondence with John George, back and forth across the Atlantic. George (as "Maleva," one of his more frequent sobriquets), writes: "I can't tell you j[u]st how glad I am that correspondence is once again flying across the atlantic in 707s, VC10s, 747s, DC8s, and who knows, one of our letters just might be flown in something more exciting – an IL 62 or LOT? No perhaps that is to much to hope for."[86]

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[85] Battcock claimed to have stolen an IBM Selectric from Robert Stefanotty as repayment for Stefanotty's debt of $475.00. "G" (Gregory Battcock) to "Our Very Dearest Reverend Whyte" (Ron Whyte), 13 August 1975, Box 108, Folder "Project 2 of 2," Ron Whyte Papers.

[86] "Maleva" (John George) to "Dearest Gregory" (Gregory Battcock), No Date, Box 5, Folder 8, Gregory Battcock papers.

The diversity of stationary upon which their epistolary performance was enacted suggests the collaborators' lack of interest in faithfully replicating the visual and aesthetic conventions of the documents that they sometimes haphazardly mimicked. Onassis University stationary, for example, (which they produced themselves), included a mast featuring the university's name and its official emblem: two overlapping rings (Figure 4).[87] But they were just as likely to exchange correspondence with one another on pornographic stationary featuring orgiastic scenes of groupsex featuring (fourteen?) men (Figure 5), or half-sheet stationary plucked from a sales office at a Sheraton in Puerto Rico.[88] This eclectic archive of paperwork suggests their enthusiastic embrace of infelicitous documentation and bureaucratic failure, but it also indexes their frantic scrambles to secure access to the limitless reams of paper that would guarantee the endurance of their epistolary performance. Battcock's demand for a friend to pilfer larger quantities of stationary from his hotel in Thailand for Battcock's own use suggests both how dire, and how camp, their quest for paper was: "IF YOU DON'T SEND US SOME PIECES OF THAT ATROCIOUS STATIONARY INSTANTLY WE WILL GO CRAZY."[89]

In addition to commenting on the economy of paper that enabled their epistolary project, the collaborators reflected upon their own administrative efforts to manage the correspondence they acquired, in effect highlighting paperwork management as a part of the collaboration. Battcock writes in 1972: "Today I felt like the old lady who lived in a shoe, I

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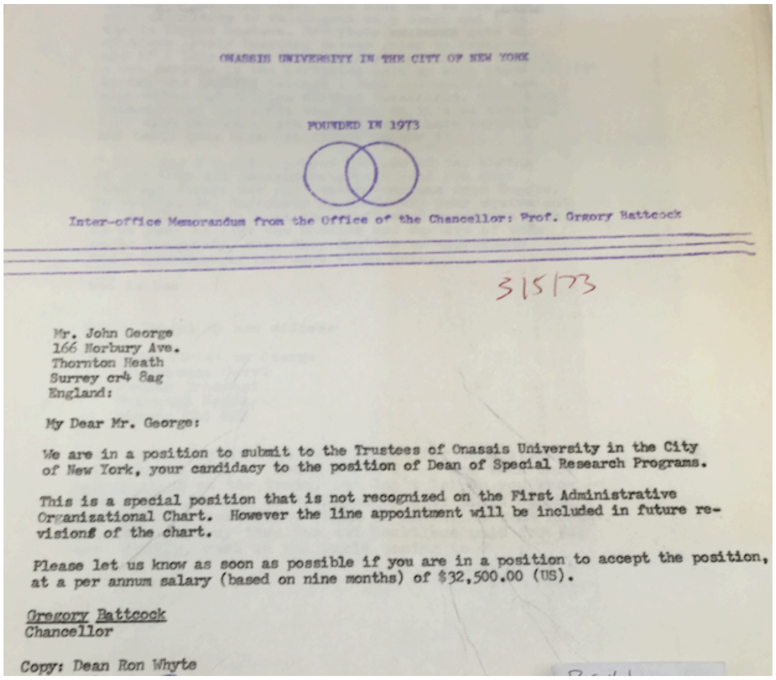
[87] Letter from Gregory Battcock to John George, 5 March 1973, Box 4, Folder 16. Gregory Battcock papers.

[88] G (Gregory Battcock) to [Ron Whyte], No Date, Box 3, Folder 3. Gregory Battcock papers, 1958.

[89] "Dr. G" (Gregory Battcock) to "My Delightful Dr. Stefanotty and Our Very Dear Kate," 26 April 1977, Box 1, Folder "Stefanotty-Bangkok Export," Gregory Battcock papers.

got so many letters from you I didn't know what to do. Actually I finally settled down and filed them."[90] Technologies of paperwork management proved so central to the epistolary performance's bureaucratic drag that in his will, Battcock left Whyte his filing cabinets.[91] Perhaps, he hoped, Whyte would live up to his intermittent sobriquet of "Director of Libraries and all print Collections" and organize the correspondence otherwise littering his apartment, what Whyte fondly called his "Library of Congress of Trash."[92]

FIGURE 4
ONASSIS UNIVERSITY STATIONARY.
Source: Chancellor Gregory Battcock to My Dear Mr. Whyte (Ron Whyte), 5 May 1973, Box 4, Folder 16. Gregory Battcock papers.



ONASSIS UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

FOUNDED IN 1973

Inter-office Memorandum from the Office of the Chancellor: Prof. Grgory Battcock

5|5|73

Mr. John George
166 Norbury Ave.
Thornton Heath
Surrey cr4 8ag
England:

My Dear Mr. George:

We are in a position to submit to the Trustees of Onassis University in the City of New York, your candidacy to the position of Dean of Special Research Programs.

This is a special position that is not recognized on the First Administrative Organizational Chart. However the line appointment will be included in future revisions of the chart.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you are in a position to accept the position, at a per annum salary (based on nine months) of $32,500.00 (US).

Gregory Battcock
Chancellor

Copy: Dean Ron Whyte

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[90] Dr. G (Gregory Battcock) to Maleva (John George), 26 July 1972, Box 4, Folder 25. Gregory Battcock papers.

[91] Gregory Battcock's Last Will and Testament, 16 August 1978, Box 3, Folder 5, Gregory Battcock papers.

[92] Ron Whyte to Mom and Dad, [?]July 1972, Box 6, Folder "Correspondence, 1976-1985, N.D.," Ron Whyte Papers.

FIGURE 5.
EPISTOLARY PERFORMANCE STATIONARY
Source: Dr. G [to Ron Whyte], No Date, Box 3, Folder 3. Gregory Battcock papers.

The performance collaboration's thematic concerns with issues of work and methodological concerns with the production of infelicitous – and sometimes fraudulent – documents were mutually constitutive endeavors. One extreme example of these intersecting concerns includes Gregory Battcock's 1974 cover letter for a faculty position at Columbia University, which he may or may not have submitted formally to architectural historian Alfred Frazer, then the Chair of Columbia's Department of Art History and Archaeology.[93] In the letter, Battcock identified his PhD from Onassis University as a credential qualifying him to assume a role on Columbia's faculty, before subsequently noting that he would "gladly accept, for the greater progress of scholarship, your offer of a small salary."[94] At the time, Battcock was at William Paterson College, where he had been on faculty since 1970, and he was graduate student in Art History at New York University, from which he would receive his PhD in 1979.

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[93] Gregory Battcock to Alfred Frazer, 18 January 1974, Box 4, Folder 13, Gregory Battcock papers.

[94] Ibid.

The epistolary performance project stages the imbrications of work and infelicitous documents within correspondence that might otherwise seem to hover on its periphery. This correspondence includes letters that address Whyte, Battcock, and George's "actual" everyday lives rather than their fictive enterprises, save their use in their signatures of titles that they did not actually hold, such as when "Rev. Ron Whyte" submitted a letter to "Gregory Battcock, M.D., Ph.D.," and then "Rev. Battcock" responded to "Dr. Whyte."[95] Titles aside, they discuss in these letters the banal matters of their lives as actual art workers: Battcock submits passive aggressive inquiries to Whyte about his lack of progress on their collaborative film history textbook; Whyte invites Battcock to a workshop production of his play *Disability, A Comedy* and requests assistance in preparing his CV.[96]

If creating, circulating, and managing infelicitous documents provided this circle of disabled and queer artists the ability to explore themes of work and employment, these themes of work and employment also prompted opportunities for Whyte, Battcock, and George to produce, distribute, and collect infelicitous documents. In a 1973 letter, Battcock invited George to join the Board of Trustees at one of their infelicitous institutions, a Manhattan-based counseling center for "homosexuals." George responded by promising to "take my duties [as a trustee] seriously and act with enthusiasm and sincerity."[97]George informed Battcock that if he would "include [his] name on the official stationary of the

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[95] Gregory Battcock, M.D., Ph.D. to Rev. Ron Whyte, "Internal Memorandum," 23 January 1979, Box 4, Folder 12; Rev. Battcock to Dr. Whyte "un-official Memorandum," 23 January 1979, Box 4, Folder 12, Gregory Battcock papers.

[96] "g" (Gregory Battcock) to "Ron [Whyte] and Beach," 15 October 1979, Box 2, Folder 17; "R" (Ron Whyte) to "Dr. G" (Gregory Battcock), 27 November 1979, Box 2, Folder 17; R. Whyte to Dr. Battcock, No Date, Box 1, Folder "Hartford University," Gregory Battcock papers.

[97] "Maleva" (John George) to Dr. Battcock, 13 March 1973, Box 4, Folder 19, Gregory Battcock papers.

[counseling center] [Battcock] will be amply rewarded."[98] George's act demonstrates his (and by extension, the collaboration's) playful faith in an inscription upon stationary both to index employment and to prompt an admirable work ethic. The collaborators further demonstrate this interest when they plot the possibility of forging press cards identifying them as affiliates, such as "Editor's Special Envoy" of *Art & Artists* magazine, for which George worked as the Advertising Manager (and later as an editor), and for which Battcock intermittently worked as a New York Correspondent.[99] Even as two of the three collaborators actually worked for and had economic ties (however fraught) to the magazine, their interest was in creating and parading infelicitous credentials for positions that were whimsical, excessive, and non-existent.[100] But correspondence in which Battcock offers George a position at Onassis University is perhaps the most instructive evidence for understanding how the collaboration staged concerns with work and employment as prompts for the production of infelicitous documents.[101] The position "Dean of Special Research Programs" was purported to come with a salary of "$32,500.00 (US)."[102]

Battcock's penning of an offer letter for a job that did not exist seems par for the course within the conventions of this epistolary performance project. Just a few months later, Whyte would resign from his fictive deanship at the same university. But this offer

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[98] Ibid.

[99] "Maleva" (John George) to [Gregory Battcock], 5 November [19??], Box 4, Folder 15, Gregory Battcock papers

[100] As many of the letters within this network of correspondence demonstrate, Battcock was in an ongoing financial battle with the magazine, which tended to pay him in travel vouchers that often expired before he was able to use them.

[101] Letter from Gregory Battcock to John George, 5 March 1973, Box 4, Folder 16, Gregory Battcock papers.

[102] Ibid.

letter proves far more provocative in terms of what it reveals about other Onassis University paperwork. Battcock confesses that this particular position does not yet exist within the university's flow chart, but assures George that he is willing to revise the flowchart, to produce additional paperwork, in order for these two documents – the flow chart and the offer letter – to be in proper alignment. Battcock thus demonstrates how individual documents within the collaborators' archive of bureaucratic drag acknowledge other documents and how those documents might actually prompt the proliferation of additional archival documents. Elsewhere in the performance project, documents plagued with errors and inconsistencies never seemed to bother the collaborators, infelicitous not only with respect to actually existing "institutional frames" that invest documents with "cultural weight" in the modern era, but with one another.[103] But here, Battcock registers the tension between the (fake) job he offered George and the range of (fake) jobs existing university paperwork authorized him to offer George. He interprets this as an opportunity: an occasion to create more paperwork in the form of a revised university human resources flowchart.

This centripetal citational practice, in which documents both reference and prompt the production of other infelicitous documents, proves instructive for understanding the project as a whole, most notably in terms of how it demonstrates how the persistent production, revision, evaluation, and management of documentation was central for this collaborative performance of bureaucratic drag. Many documents suggest that the fictive enterprises on whose behalf Whyte, Battcock, and George corresponded were aware of one another, and in some cases, even overlapped.

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[103] Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 5.

The intertextual connections between the H.C.C.C. (the Homosexual Community Counseling Center) and the collaborators' various commercial airlines are especially prominent. They highlight how this performance of bureaucratic drag took on the subject of work not only with respect to disability history, but queer history as well. Commercial airlines figure prominently within the history of the gay American workforce and became a target of legal contestation for gender non-conforming men to pursue employment discrimination suits following Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[104] Furthermore, the homosexual-oriented mental health counseling center was an institutional site that cut across queer and disability histories and their contestations of psychiatric power. Indeed, queer resistance to the reach of psychiatric power gained momentum in concert with the unfolding of this epistolary performance project. 1973 marked not only the passage of the Rehabilitation Act, which included civil rights provisions for disabled Americans and launched a series of efforts to consider Americans with disability employable, but also the removal of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder from the DSM.

Whyte, Battcock, and George's bureaucratic drag drew upon these intersecting histories through their mobilization of a counseling center (and its attendant paperwork) in general and through the H.C.C.C. in particular. Unlike the airlines and Onassis University, the H.C.C.C. was an actual, functioning counseling center that had provided gay-affirming counseling since its founding by evangelical psychotherapist Ralph Blair in 1971. Gregory Battcock served on the H.C.C.C.'s Board of Trustees (his name appears on their legitimate

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[104] Phil Tiemeyer, "Flight Attendants and Queer Civil Rights." In *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of the Flight Attendant* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 80-108. As I review in the introduction to this dissertation, the flight attendant has also proved to be an important figure for thinking about the continuities between theatrical labor and quotidian modes of affective labor in the late twentieth century. See Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

stationary!). The epistolary performance project's iteration of the H.C.C.C., then, referenced this counseling center that existed and functioned within the realm of the actual, but animated its paperwork in order to carry out (or to pretend to carry out) activity that aligned with their own interests, rather than anything that fell under the auspices of the (actual) H.C.C.C.[105]

Whyte, Battcock, and George's performance of bureaucratic drag featured overlapping fictive enterprises that collectively explored the intersections of disability history and queer history, not only with regards to the reign of psychiatric power (in the case of the counseling center), but also with regards to the history of work (in the case of the airlines). When reviewing compensation in his offer letter to George, Battcock notes that his colleague would be entitled to "collect a minimum of $175.00" per consultation at the center and that he might advise clients on, among other things, "what airline they should take to Tripoli or Atlanta (Ga.)."[106] This indicates that the collaborators mobilized the H.C.C.C., at least in part, as a cover business designed to direct consumers to their (fake) airlines.[107] The collaborators also plotted to use stationary from the counseling center when they circulated surveys to actually-existing commercial airlines with the request that they answer questions such as the following:

> Does your company consider homosexuality amongst your employees as a) grounds for instant dismissal b) to be encouraged by virtue of the fact that most homosexuals work harder than their heterosexual counterparts and so on and so forth. Asking

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[105] "Maleva" (John George) to Dr. Battcock, 13 March 1973, Box 4, Folder 19, Gregory Battcock papers.

[106] Dr. Gregory Battcock, Head, Board of Trustees to Mr. John George, 8 March 1973, Box 4, Folder 19, Gregory Battcock papers.

[107] G.W.A. to Passenger, No Date, Box 4, Folder 22, Gregory Battcock papers.

> them how many homosexuals they employ, their company policy and so on, their replies will be a scream![108]

Lest there be any confusion about whether the collaborators had any sincere interest in gathering data about the homosexual work ethic – superior or otherwise – we would do well to remember that they dreamed of staffing their own airlines exclusively with "sarcastic fags," whose primary responsibility would be to "argue and scream at the passengers."[109]

A number of factors made this epistolary performance of bureaucratic drag an exemplar of what I call disemployment: the interest in the subject of work; the enthusiasm for the production of infelicitous and sometimes outright fraudulent documents; an enchantment with a single document's capacity to prompt the production of endless chains of paperwork; a commitment to exploring the intersections of disability history and queer history. This performance of bureaucratic drag enabled Whyte, Battcock, and George to simultaneously embrace and disavow work through their performance of bureaucratic drag, with both "bureaucracy" and "performance" signaling modes of fake or illegitimate work: the former signaling popular associations with the wasteful, the inefficient, and the unproductive, and the latter a mode of work that, as Nicholas Ridout and others have noted, often appears as "nonwork or 'play.'"[110] And they did so within a context in which dominant discourses of disability venerated work and betrayed intensifying anxieties about the fraudulent.

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[108] "Maleva" (John George) to Dr. Battcock, 13 March 1973, Box 4, Folder 19, Gregory Battcock papers.

[109] "Maleva" (John George), "page two letter three," Box 4, Folder 22, Gregory Battcock Papers.

[110] Nicholas Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, Love* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 9.

Turning to Whyte's critical writings on bureaucracy clarifies the value of "bureaucratic drag" as an optic for understanding the performance of disemployment. These writings do not offer a full-fledged theory of bureaucracy, nor do they aspire to. They represent Whyte's own effort to document his experience with bureaucratic institutions, practices, and personnel in such a way that outlines the role of state bureaucracy in producing and managing disabled subjectivity. Whyte's critiques of bureaucracy suffused a great deal of his writings, including some correspondence that also appeared as part of his epistolary performance project. Toward the end of this collaboration in 1977, Whyte noted that he felt "radicalized" by bureacracy as a result of his encounters with the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, which was responsible for providing him with resources to make him employable.[111] He writes:

> The positive side of the tortuous complications of setting up a simple fellowship for a disabled artist caught in the web of killer welfare bureaucracy is that we have all had an interesting and exhausting lesson in the workings of bureaucracy that maims where it wishes to heal, and that breaks the spirit while wishing to rehabilitate the body.[112]

Furthermore, Whyte represents experiences with debilitating scenes of welfare bureaucracy, rather than the experience of having an impairment, as that which qualifies one to speak of disability experience and to contribute to disability politics. Indeed, when it came time to recommending who might teach a course on disability at Union Theological Seminary,

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[111] Ron Whyte to Anderson Clark, 20 November 1977, Box 97, Folder "RCFA Grant, 1977, 1 of 2," Ron Whyte Papers.

[112] Ibid.

Whyte was insistent: an instructor with, “NO WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF THESE AGENCIES IS USELESS.”[113]

Whyte’s variegated writings may have failed to constitute a comprehensive theory of bureaucracy, but the bureaucratic sites he targeted within his criticism were wide ranging, to say the least. In 1975, he suggested to Battcock the possibility that he might “destro[y] the entire Welfare System” as his master’s thesis.[114] Still, within Whyte’s criticism of the U.S. welfare system (and its bureaucratic enactment), two particular threads stand out. The first concerns the temporality of bureaucracy (that is to say, welfare’s bureaucratic drag). The second thread concerns bureaucratic procedures committed to securing and stabilizing the identities of welfare recipients, efforts that mobilize a range of regulatory technologies within the longer history of “fantasies of identification.”[115]

Whyte’s indictment of bureaucracy on temporal grounds resonates with the bureaucratic drag of his epistolary performance project, which embraced bureaucratic inertia through the seemingly endless production of paperwork. This critique of the lethargic pace of bureaucratic progress appears in the dozens of letters he wrote to government agencies, doctors, philanthropic foundations, and other sources of emergency relief funding. These letters became increasingly frequent in the 1980s, when Whyte simultaneously experienced intensified physical, social, and economic precarity. Yet they also punctuate his writing throughout the 1970s, including writings he produced in tandem with (and sometimes as part of) the epistolary performance project. Many of these letters address the debilitating

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[113] Ron Whyte to Bob Neale, 31 March 1976, Box 1, Folder “Correspondence 1976-1977,” Ron Whyte Papers.

[114] “Rev. Ron (in Progress) Whyte” to Dr. G (Gregory Battcock), 18 August 1975, Box 2, Folder 22, Gregory Battcock papers.

[115] Samuels, 2.

effects he experienced when state agencies were slow to provide him prosthetic legs and, just as frequently, the even more debilitating effects – including chronic pain and tissue damage – he experienced as a result of the poor quality of the ill-fitting prosthetics the state eventually provided him. "Thanks to the delay of all the bureaucrats," Whyte writes in a 1977 letter to Battcock, "the current pain may be permanent and require hacking off more of the old body."[116] Whyte identifies the reluctant pace of bureaucratic progress not as a matter of inconvenience, but as a biopolitical technology through which disabled subjects were targeted for "slow death."[117] "In the disability game," Whyte writes, "to be patient, and to wait, can be a cheap form of physical suicide."[118]

But Whyte's critical writings also took aim at bureaucracy's identificatory fervor, thereby echoing the bureaucratic drag of the epistolary performance project that mobilized documents with dubious felicity statuses. In these writings, he addresses the mounting anxieties about disability fraudulence and the corresponding investment in marking, securing, and otherwise fixing the identities of disabled people. Whyte was constantly subject to surveillance by government agencies throughout the course of his career, but this scrutiny intensified during the summer of 1975, when, Whyte writes, New York began experiencing "cosmic financial upheaval."[119] Whyte well understood that his own experience of intensified

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[116] "Dr. G" (Gregory Battcock) to "Our Dear Whyte" (Ron Whyte)/"R" (Ron Whyte) to "Dr. G" (Gregory Battcock), 7 October 1977, Box 4, Folder 9, Gregory Battcock papers.

[117] Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death: Obesity, Sovereignty, Lateral Agency." In *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 95-120.

[118] Ron Whyte to Anderson Clark, 20 November 1977, Box 97, Folder "RCFA Grant, 1977, 1 of 2," Ron Whyte Papers.

[119] Ron Whyte to Mom and Dad, 5 August 1975, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence, 1975-1987," Ron Whyte Papers.

scrutiny extended from anti-welfare sentiments that proliferated within this new economic context.[120] "The first people who get tossed around and investigated are the disabled," he notes, before adding as a coy aside, "(we all know what notorious rip-off artists the handicapped are)."[121] Whyte documents the extensive surveillance he experienced in the wake of this new political reality: unplanned home inspections by welfare officers and the increased frequency of his redetermination meetings, which periodically evaluated his eligibility for resources.

Of great interest to Whyte was that the state agency did not express its own interest in discerning whether a welfare subject was "really" disabled exclusively, or even primarily, through "live" encounters between the welfare consumer and the welfare officer. Rather, efforts to secure a disabled subject's identity increasingly relied upon conventionalized and institutionalized faith in the power of the document. Ellen Samuels refers to this intensified commitment to documents as technologies of "biocertification," as means of definitively marking and securing the identity of the subject in question.[122] Given Whyte's propensity for collaborating with others to produce infelicitous forms of documentation, it should surprise noone to reveal that Whyte met this shift toward biocertification with a kind of irreverent enthusiasm, rather than with indignation. "THE ORANGE CARD JUST ARRIVED," he writes

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[120] Whyte's criticisms of bureaucracy also discussed how racialized and gendered modes of welfare surveillance intensified during this period, and how they both intersected with and departed from the kinds of disability surveillance I discuss here.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Samuels, 9.

upon receiving the document that confirms his disability status, "I am a CERTIFIED HOMEBOUND CASE."[123]

Whyte's encounters with intensified national anxieties about disability fraudulence were far from exceptional, but neither were they fully representative of the broader terms within which such anxieties were most commonly articulated. After all, Whyte's life and career become a key site in which social anxieties about the potential fraudulence of disability converge with another set of worries haunted by anxiety over fakery: theatre. Welfare officers began investigating Whyte following Cherry Lane's production of his play *Welcome to Andromeda*.[124] The play featured a quadraplegic protagonist. A local news broadcaster, unable to imagine the possibility that a disabled playwright might author a disabled character whose disability differed from his own, mis-identified Whyte as being quadraplegic. When welfare administrators caught wind of the broadcast, they investigated Whyte on the suspicion that he might be pretending to be quadraplegic, rather than trusting that he was disabled with an impairment that differed from that of a character in one of his plays. This occasion led to the need for Whyte to seek re-determination and to confirm his disability status through the aforementioned "orange card" that he received so enthusiastically.

Attending to the multiple senses of bureaucratic drag (theatrical and temporal) that inhere in both Whyte's critical writings on bureaucracy and his campy enactment of bureaucratic procedures allows us to see how Whyte's epistolary collaboration drew upon two dominant discourses of disability in the 1970s: growing efforts to push disabled

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[123] Ron Whyte to Leon Strimber, No Date, Box 1, Folder "Correspondence 1973," Ron Whyte Papers.

[124] Ron Whyte to Ellen Neuwald, No Date, Box 1, Folder "Correspondence 1973," Ron Whyte Papers.

Americans toward the labor market, and increased anxiety about disability fraud within the context of intensified social and economic precarity. Anxiety about disability fraudulence was in itself also an anxiety about the relationship between disability and work, and the privileged role disability seemed to enjoy in determining who must work and who cannot. Through their bureaucratic drag, through producing, circulating, and managing infelicitous documents, Whyte and Battcock simultaneously embraced and disavowed work, enacting a resolutely ambivalent politic about the new triangulations among disability, performance and work that were beginning to sediment simultaneously with the duration of their epistolary project.

Whyte and his collaborators' performances of bureaucratic drag were not isolated stagings of bureaucratic encounters within the aesthetic, political, and quotidian practices of the 1970s. Disabled lesbian activist Corbette O'Toole, who would later co-found the integrated dance company Axis Dance, describes something that sounds starkly similar to bureaucratic drag when she describes her participation in the 504 protests in 1977 in San Francisco.[125] These protests targeted the debilitating time lag between the passage of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973 and the creation of enforcement mechanisms for Section 504 legislation, which prohibited discrimination based upon disability status for federal contractors. In the spring of 1977, more than a hundred disability activists took over the HEW office in San Francisco as part of an organized direct action. With the coalitional support of Black Panthers, lesbian feminists, and others, they sustained their occupation for twenty-five days – to this day, the longest occupation of a federal building in the United States. It only ended when HEW Secretary Joseph Calfino finally agreed to develop

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[125] Corbette O'Toole, "Flexing Power: San Francisco 504 Sit-In." In *Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History* (Fort Worth: Autonomous Press, 2015), 54-74. I follow O'Toole's account in my review of the 504 protests below.

mechanisms to enforce these civil rights provisions. In O'Toole's account, she and some of her collaborators fought HEW's bureaucratic drag with bureaucratic drag: they mobilized against HEW's lethargic efforts to create enforcement mechanisms in part by irreverently assuming the identities of government workers in the buildings they occupied, including "answer[ing] their phones saying, '504 sit-in. How may I help you?'"[126] O'Toole's drag of bureaucratic personhood in order to both contest and endure state bureaucracy's temporal inertia appears to invert Whyte's bureaucratic performances. Whereas Whyte quit jobs that he did not occupy, O'Toole mimicked the administrative labor of a position for which she had not been hired.

But bureaucratic drag seems to have also unfolded outside of disability contexts, as in the proliferation of white-collar office folklore documented by anthropologists Alan Dundes and Carl R. Pagter in their 1975 study, *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*.[127] By examining a broad swath of office humor in the form of irreverent paperwork – letters, memoranda, application forms, and the like – these scholars investigate how white-collar workers embraced the production, dissemination, and management of paperwork in order to address both pressing social problems and navigate, in their understanding, the alienation of working in a modern office. In light of Whyte and Battcock's collaboration, this might seem a familiar enough scenario. The paper-pushers Dundes and Pagter discuss produce parodies of office paperwork, such as guidelines for "performance reviews" – in order to sustain themselves during another day at the office. Whyte, Battcock, and their collaborators, however, created an elaborate archive of

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[126] Ibid., 66.

[127] Alan Dundes and Carl R. Pagter, *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975).

paperwork for offices that did not exist, in order to survive another day not in the offices that did not employ them.

Whtye's 1984 performance about his cosmetic glove both documented his rejection of work and entrepreneurialized this refusal. In effect, Whyte enacted an ambivalent compromise between an antiwork politic and a strategic negotiation of his own economic precarity. Whyte's epistolary collaboration with Battcock and George evinces a similarly ambivalent politic, especially when read in tandem with Whyte's critical writings on bureaucracy. These disabled and queer artists took a peculiar amount of pleasure in dragging the figure and functions of the bureaucrat within a wide range of (infelicitous) institutional locations. This dragging of bureaucracy took interest in the bureaucrat as a particular kind of worker. One exemplary bureaucrat within Whyte's writing is the government functionary responsible for administering paperwork to suture the alignment between the document and the disabled subject. They enacted these authenticating procedures to secure divisions between who must work and who might not. But in the wake of the disability rights movement, a withering welfare state, and the attendant expansion of the category of the employable, they also enacted these authenticating procedures in order to determine who deserved resources (and what kind of resources) to bolster their employability, as well as the range and breadth of employment options that should fall under that rubric of employability.

The bureaucrat is also a peculiar form of worker insofar as her labor, variously understood as feminine, nonproductive, wasteful, and inefficient, twins the theatrical labor of the actor, a figure that achieved significant purchase within disability policy, activist, and artistic discourses throughout the 1970s, the same period in which Whyte, Battcock, and George's epistolary performance project entered into circulation. The labor of the actor became malleable for a range of political and ideological projects within U.S. disability history precisely because her work can appear as nonwork. A similar argument might be made for the political and ideological malleability of claiming bureaucratic labor to be (in a repurposing of a provocation by Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider about the labor of the actor), "not not work."[128] Such a claim about bureuacratic labor's excesses, inefficiencies, and artifice might risk colluding with neoliberal impulses to weaken instiutions rather than to build more robust ones, as Shannon Jackson warns.[129] Such anti-state claims are all the more troubling precisely because of how administrative labor within state agencies has long figured as a paradigmatic opportunity for economic mobility for women and people of color.[130] As Whyte demonstrates – with less optimism in his writings – it was also becoming a site of economic mobility for people with disabilities, creating a class of what he called "house cripples."[131]

But it is not inevitable that framings of bureaucratic labor as theatrical labor, as work that appears as something else, as "nonwork or play," to borrow two possibilities from Nicholas Ridout, should result in such neoliberal critiques of state institutions. We might do well to think of Whyte and his collaborators' decision to displace bureaucratic labor from the realm of the state agency to a myriad of overlapping private enterprises as not only an effort to drag bureaucratic subjects and bureaucratic remains, but to drag forward bureaucratic institutions in the age of its dismantling. If state bureaucracies were in the business of the not not work of bureaucratic labor in the name of rendering disabled Americans employable,

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[128] Ridout and Schneider, 6.

[129] Jackson, 14.

[130] Rung, Margaret C., *Servants of the State: Managing Diversity and Democracy in the Federal Workforce, 1933–1953* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

[131] Ron Whyte to Bob Neale, 31 March 1976, Box 1, Folder "Correspondence 1976-1977," Ron Whyte Papers.

then miming bureaucracy in the form of bureaucratic drag, the not not work of playing the bureaucrat, offered a performance of disemployment that was cautious of conflating disability politics with work, even as it did so through a mode of work both bureaucratic and theatrical. Along with Whyte's 1984 prosthetics lecture, this epistolary performance modeled ways of critically performing disemployment before the onslaught of more resolutely pro-work forms of performance that would populate the trajectory of disemployment in the decades to come.

CHAPTER TWO

Rehabilitating (Occupational) Realism: Staging Employability and Authenticity at the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped

When Rick Curry attended an audition for a mouthwash commercial, he had one deceptively modest ambition: to take a shot at using his acting chops to supplement his income. Like many New Yorkers, Curry was still reeling from the effects of a recession initiated earlier in the 1970s.[1] The 30-year-old Jesuit brother and educational theatre graduate student at NYU got both more and less than he had bargained for. The receptionist working the audition denied Curry entry to his appointment with the casting director on the basis that he had only one arm.[2] Curry credits this experience with explicit prejudice with prompting his development of disability consciousness.[3] Upon his departure from the audition that was not to be, Curry suspected that everyone was staring at him, considering him “crippled…like I’m less than they are.”[4] This anxiety soon gave way to curiosity about how his own

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[1] Olivia Barker, “Center stage, with a message about disabilities ‘Siciliano’ a milestone for

[2] Rick Curry, “Life’s Bread,” *Santa Clara Lectures* 7.3 (8 April 2001): 5.

[3] When narrating his entry into disability consciousness, Curry might have elected to foreground discrimination from the Catholic Church as much as his exclusion from the theatrical labor market. Curry claims to have entered the Jesuit order as a Brother rather than a priest because that was his calling, but his disability would have rendered him ineligible for the priesthood earlier in his life. Curry only pursued ordination as a priest at the age of sixty-six following a change in Vatican policy. Monica Yant Kinney, “Called by adversity; The Rev. Rick Curry turned a humiliating rejection into a life of faith and creativity,” *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 24 December 2009.

[4] Curry, 5.

experience related to the systemic problems people with disabilities encountered on a regular basis. "What," Curry wondered, "do people do, people with greater disabilities than I, who want to study theater, who want to be in show business, who want to gargle nationally?"[5]

Curry's efforts to discover professional theatre resources for disabled actors led him to the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center in New London, Connecticut. (Curry's attention was drawn to NTD by colleagues including Al Carmines, a gay playwright and producer who, like Ron Whyte, had attended Union Theological Seminary.)[6] In 1977, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) provided Curry a grant to spend the summer as a consultant at NTD and to "recommend to the N.T.D. ways that their expertise and facilities at the O'Neill Theatre Center could foster theatre training for disabled groups other than the deaf population" (PP 105). The "depth and scope" of NTD's resources impressed Curry, but his report contended that the campus's physically inaccessible architecture made it a poor candidate for cross-disability collaboration (105). He also harbored reservations about providing theatre training to the constituencies with whom he was primarily concerned – "the blind and orthopedically disabled" – alongside the deaf, given the "deaf community['s]" complicated relationship to disability identification (105).[7]

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[5] Ibid., 6.

[6] Richard Jerome Curry, "A Practical Philosophy of Theatre Education for the Disabled" (PhD diss., New York University, 1986), 104. Hereafter *Practical Philosophy*, cited parenthetically in text as PP.

[7] Curry frames the complexity of this identification in terms of deafness as a "hidden disability," a debatable claim given the numerous ways in which deafness might signify (105). The complexity of the d/Deaf's complicated disability identifications is more accurately attributed to their identification as a linguistic minority, sometimes in opposition to, and sometimes in tandem with, disability identity.

In the fall of 1977, Curry convened a group of friends working in professional theatre – including Mimi Kennedy, Ray DeMattis, Ann Doughtry, and Karl Laird – and together, they founded the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped (NTWH) (106).[8] The goal of NTWH was to provide disabled people with training to work as professional actors, and the organization eventually sought (but failed) to "establish a professional repertory theatre company in order to demonstrate the capabilities of its disabled performers and thereby help change negative attitudes about the disabled population in America" (Abstract 2). The workshop was not interested in developing a disability aesthetic that would challenge the norms of commercial theatre, but rather, in "inserting...the disabled performer into the mainstream of professional theatre life, " as opposed to developing oppositional aesthetic and political practices (15).

The NTWH grew in both scope and focus over the thirty-odd years of its existence (the precise date of its dissolution remains unclear). NTWH's first cohort of students matriculated to acting classes in the workshop's Tribeca loft "in the Summer of 1979" and eventually trained more than 5,000 actors, some of whom worked Off-Broadway and on television (107). The workshop changed home bases within Manhattan; expanded to a secondary campus in Belfast, Maine, complete with a 450-seat theatre, art gallery, and fund-raising bakery enterprise; operated a multi-million dollar annual budget; performed a successful cabaret series at Don't Tell Mama in midtown Manhattan; toured performances of original dramatic literature throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland; staged works written specifically for them by luminaries such as Edward Albee, Al Carmines,

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[8] Curry alternates between using "handicapped" and "disabled." Curry attributes his preference for the term "handicapped" to Frank Bowe's (1978) distinction between "handicap" as the "social component" of bodily difference and "disability" as the "biological component," an inversion of contemporary usages of disability and impairment (PP 5).

and Harvey Fierstein; and developed a writing program for U.S. veterans disabled in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[9] These accomplishments began to wane in the early 2000s when the workshop experienced profound financial problems. Curry attributed these troubles to the national economic crisis that unfolded in 2007 as well as changing charitable practices following the events of September 11, 2001, after which donors "redirected" funds "to groups associated with the survivors of the terrorist attacks."[10] This funding crisis was the beginning of the end. The workshop placed its summer writing programs on hiatus for two consecutive years (2004 and 2005) in response to foreclosure threats on multiple properties.[11] The downtown Belfast properties (including the art gallery and bakery) were sold at foreclosure auction by 2005, and the town seized the workshop's larger performing arts complex in 2010.[12] Curry's own career trajectory shifted in tandem with these financial troubles, and the workshop did not long survive these events. The workshop had grown increasingly preoccupied with veterans during the last decade of its operation, and the

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[9] "Life's Bread," 7; Tom Groening, "Belfast arts school escapes auction block, director says," *Bangor Daily News*, 12 March 2005; Tom Groening, "Belfast arts campus faces foreclosure; Theater official says benefactor being lined up to halt sale of $5M in property," *Bangor Daily News*, 9 February 2005; Robert Lipsyte, "Coping; Eight Struggling Actors: A Story of Hope," *New York Times*, 13 February 1994; Kathy Boccella, "Stage Presence That's What the Disabled Finally Have in A Landmark Production By and About Them," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 18 November 1999; Robert E. Tomasson, "Social Events," *New York Times*, 18 February 1990; Tom Groening, "Theater group for disabled works with Iraq war injured," *Bangor Daily News*, 26 July 2005.

[10] Tom Groening, "Belfast arts school escapes auction block, director says," *Bangor Daily News*, 12 March 2005; Abigail Curtis, "Belfast seizes $3.6M building for nonpayment of sewer bill," *Bangor Daily News*, 20 November 2010.

[11] Tom Groening, "Belfast arts school escapes auction block, director says," *Bangor Daily News*, 12 March 2005.

[12] Walter Griffin, "Owners revise plans for downtown Belfast property," *Bangor Daily News*, 5 August 2005; Abigail Curtis, "Belfast seizes $3.6M building for nonpayment of sewer bill," *Bangor Daily News*, 20 November 2010.

relationships Curry forged with Walter Reed Memorial Hospital and the Paralyzed Veterans of America led him to reside in Washington, D.C. full-time beginning in 2009. Around this time, Curry pursued entry into the priesthood and became ordained at age sixty-six.[13] He went on to found and direct the Academy for Veterans at Georgetown University, where he taught courses in both theatre and theology until he passed away in December 2015.

Overview

This chapter argues that two rehabilitative projects animated NTWH's institutional development and its philosophy of actor training. One of NTWH's rehabilitative projects concerned disabled Americans' "occupational realism," the normative breadth of career trajectories in which they could "realistically" conceive themselves participating.[14] That is, training disabled people for acting opportunities on commercial stages was a practice through which NTWH sought to transform how disabled people understood themselves as "employable." I address NTWH's ambivalent orientation to the question of theatre's therapeutic and rehabilitative valences before examining NTWH's (unrealized) efforts to found a permanent professional repertory company for disabled actors. Curry and his colleagues articulated the benefits of this potential company in terms of how it would counter disability stigma, not in terms of the economic opportunities it might provide disabled artists. But no one from NTWH identifies the origins of disability stigma or understands the potential company's theatrical repertoire as affecting this mission to counter stigma. The workshop emphasized the hypothetical company's *professional* status: NTWH

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[13] Monica Yant Kinney, "Called by adversity; The Rev. Rick Curry turned a humiliating rejection into a life of faith and creativity," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 24 December 2009.

[14] Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Occupational Realism," *TDR* 56.4 (2012): 32-48, at 40-41.

understood that this company would counter stigma by providing ostensibly nondisabled audiences opportunities to witness disabled people at work. If rendering apparent the disabled as workers aided in the project of countering stigma, then the source of disability stigma is the perception of disabled people as non–workers.

The professional repertory company would undermine the grounds of such stigma through a representational tautology. Disabled people did not need to become workers: they already were workers. This curious maneuver alters dominant understandings of vocational rehabilitation in the 1970s. It was disabled people's occupational realism, rather than their productive capacities, that called for rehabilitative intervention. This "realism" demarcated the boundaries of what disabled people could, or should, imagine as the content of their working lives. Acting, then, needed not become the actual activity through which the disabled achieved economic opportunity, but to function as a horizon for an increasingly capacious range of career aspirations.

Curry and his collaborators hoped to restrict concerns with occupational realism to NTWH's earliest years, but this rehabilitative project persisted (albeit unevenly) for nearly three decades. NTWH understood this emphasis on expanding disabled people's conception of their *employability* as an intermediary step before they could focus on *employment* and upon improving the material conditions in which the disabled lived. Consider, for example, the workshop's emphasis on developing "role models," who were disabled actors remunerated for their work in commercial theatre and who, in so doing, represented acting as a viable line of work for future disabled actors. The disabled actor as a role model scripted disabled people as always potentially participating in a theatrical relation: the disabled actor role model provided a precedent iteration of expansive occupational realism in the present for future people with disabilities to inhabit. In so doing, the role model also suggests the utility of performance as an optic for understanding continuities between theatrical labor and other forms of work to which disabled Americans might now aspire.

But NTWH not only invested its efforts to expand the occupational realism of the disabled; it constricted it as well. Thus, I attend to the diverse modes of labor the workshop invited – and sometimes compelled – its students to perform. Engaging this broad range of labor demonstrates the changing face of occupational realism between the workshop's emergence in the late 1970s and its dissolution in approximately 2010. Occupational realism proved to be a moving target, and it did not always move in the direction of liberatory possibility for disabled people.

NTWH's second rehabilitative project addressed the "problem" of disabled people's genuineness. In the workshop's understanding, the exclusion of disabled people from the arts marginalized them within American cultural life, but it also prevented them from becoming "genuine." Yet exclusion from the arts, and by extension, the social category of the genuine, was not something that happened to subjects whose disability status was secured in advance: the decoupling of disability from the genuine and the subsequent yoking of disability to the ingenuine constituted their disablement. I demonstrate how the workshop's efforts to rehabilitate disabled people's genuineness responded to intensifying anxieties about disability and fraudulence within the political and economic milieu of the 1970s.

NTWH pursued this rehabilitative project by emphasizing a realism of a different kind: the acting system derived by director Constantin Stanislavski. To some extent, this was an entirely predictable choice for an organization committed to training actors for commercial work. Stanislavski-derived acting practices, including method acting, had been a preferred methodology for commercial performance work since the 1920s, when

Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre first toured the United States. Yet this choice is also a peculiar one insofar as Stanislavski's system compels ablebodiedness, and is even predicated upon resolutely phobic approaches to physical, sensory, cognitive, and psychosocial differences. The workshop's turn to Stanislavski, then, was hardly a foregone conclusion. Indeed, rehabilitating the disabled as genuine via Stanislavski also required that the workshop rehabilitate the Stanislavski system's relationship to disabled embodiment.

Curry developed a neo-Stanislavskian acting philosophy indebted to his take on natural law. I theorize the opportunities that this insistence on a correspondence between being and action created and foreclosed for the disabled constituencies under Curry's tutelage. This emphasis on the natural elaborated medical models of disability (in which disability is understood as an individual flaw that needs to be corrected) that nevertheless understood disability as an ontologically capacious subject within which – and from which – one might act. I read Curry in dialogue with Stanislavski's manual-novel *An Actor Prepares*, one of the primary vehicles through which Stanislavski disseminated his acting system, and one of the key texts Curry drew upon in his own writing.[15] I conclude by examining how the workshop revises Stanislavski in a way that understands disability as a resource for – rather than an impediment to – "genuine" acting.

A Brief Genealogy of Rehabilitation

NTWH is uniquely situated within the history of rehabilitative practice in the United States. In this section, I trace a brief overview of "rehabilitation" within American

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[15] Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth R. Hapgood. (New York: Routledge, 1989).

sociocultural practice that foregrounds the utility of theorizing the workshop's contributions to theatre history and disability history in terms of rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation has enjoyed a strange career in U.S. social and cultural history. Rehabilitation might not always terminate with a complete fix (a cure), but it nevertheless participates in what Alison Kafer calls the "*curative imaginary*, an understanding of disability that not only *expects* and *assumes* intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehended anything other than intervention."[16] But rehabilitative logic is not governed by ideas about progress and futurity alone. Julie Passanante Elman argues that rehabilitation evinces a "polytemporal desire" to intervene in the production of the desired future and to restore bodies and minds to norms they purportedly once occupied.[17] These multiple temporal registers only begin to suggest the complexity of rehabilitation's trajectory.

In the beginning, the "American system" of rehabilitation mobilized a combination of medical and social interventions in the pursuit of secure employment for disabled adults.[18] Rehabilitation, Brad Byrom argues, "refer[ed] not only to the surgical and therapeutic treatment of cripples but to the rehabilitation of public attitudes toward disabled people."[19] Reformers emphasized the importance of education to rehabilitation in part by founding vocational rehabilitation institutions "'to create an enlightened public opinion towards the physically handicapped, so that they [would] be regarded from the standpoint of their

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[16] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 27.

[17] Julie Passanante Elman, *Chronic Youth: Disability, Sexuality, and U.S. Media Cultures of Rehabilitation* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 14.

[18] Brad Byrom, "A Pupil and a Patient: Hospital-Schools in Progressive America." In *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*. Eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 133-156.

[19] Ibid., 143.

capabilities rather than their disabilities.'"[20] By interpreting disabled people as composed of discrete sites of disability and capability, rehabilitative social reformers understood disability neither to preclude nor to eclipse the capacity for waged labor. Reformers rejected a purely medical model of disability that foregrounded disabled subjects as requiring intervention in order for them to meet the demands of the labor market. Anticipating what would come to be known as the social model of disability, reformers argued that workspaces and job responsibilities needed to be reformed in order to accommodate the capabilities of a given disabled subject.[21] But by 1920, the medical model would come to dominate rehabilitative practice: the disabled individual, rather than social conventions, practices, and attitudes, would become rehabilitation's proper subject.[22]

Rehabilitation persisted in this individualizing and medicalizing form, and by middle of the twentieth century, single mothers receiving public assistance entered rehabilitation's now-expanded purview. [23] Historian Jennifer Mittelstadt argues that rehabilitation "became the centerpiece of postwar poverty and welfare policy" as the "deep-seated personal problem of the welfare recipient" came to be understood in terms of a "handicap."[24] Dissatisfied with the suggestion that poverty was a problem of inadequate income, welfare reformers began to mobilize "therapeutic solutions to social problems" as "the lives, relationships, and

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[20] Ibid., 144.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 150-1.

[23] Jennifer Mittelstadt, "Introduction." In *Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1-19.

[24] Ibid., 11.

personalities of welfare clients" became the primary subject of poverty analysis.[25] This "individualistic and therapeutic ethos" took "'self-support'" and "'encouraging independence'" as its goals.[26] This meant that single mothers, disproportionately women of color, needed to trade welfare doles for waged work. Decades before "workfare" became formalized within the architecture of U.S. social policy, welfare reformers expanded the field of populations for whom waged work was supposed to cure social ills. Within this expansion, discourses of disability still described those subjects needing rehabilitative intervention, work was still the means by which rehabilitation was enacted, and economic independence still signified that rehabilitation had been achieved.

Alongside these developments, the U.S. Congress passed the 1954 Vocational Rehabilitation Act ammendments, which cemented Vocational Rehabilitation as an office within the recently created Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.[27] Richard Scotch argues that the "vocational" focus of rehabilitation became institutionalized at the federal level in resolutely medical terms. Greater funding for vocational rehabilitation accompanied the birth of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, as did "financial aid for professional training of medical and rehabilitation professionals…research and development in rehabilitative medicine and rehabilitative engineering…[and] additional facilities for rehabilitation and sheltered employment."[28] But the broad embrace of increasing federal

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 12.

[27] Richard K. Scotch, "American Disability Policy in the Twentieth Century." *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*. Eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 375-92.

[28] Ibid., 382.

funding and oversight of vocational rehabilitation was not a foregone conclusion. As Scotch notes, "vocational rehabilitation gained great popularity in the post-World War II era, in part because its beneficiaries were perceived as truly deserving of public assistance."[29]

Vocational rehabilitation underwent profound ideological and methodological transformations between the establishment of the OVR in the 1950s and the emergence of the disability rights movement in the 1970s. Following the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, vocational rehabilitation focused more acutely on "civil rights initiatives…and funding for local centers for independent living," emphasizing "self-help and consumer control, peer support, and environmental change."[30] This shift in funding priorities departs from rehabilitation's most medicalizing valences and suggests a different relationship to work.

As some accounts of disability policy and activism would have it, government initiatives in the 1970s tempered the insistence upon disabled Americans achieving economic independence through waged labor. For example, Scotch notes that the Vocational Rehabilitation

> program of the 1970s reflected the [Center for Independent Living's] influence in its shift of service priorities from a nearly exclusive programmatic emphasis on individuals with less severe impairments, who were considered more capable of entry into paid employment, to a more inclusive position encompassing those with more severe impairments. With this shift, the objective of VR went beyond supporting paid employment by people with disabilities to the more general goal of promoting independence.[31]

Historian Paul Longmore similarly emphasizes that the "radical changes" in vocational rehabilitation after 1973 concerned "persons with significant disabilities" for whom "the goal

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 383.

need not necessarily be employment, but preparation and assistance to live in the larger community rather than in nursing homes or institutions."[32] Indeed, for Longmore, government funding of independent living centers "for individuals for whom employment was not a practical objective" had played a minor role in rehabilitation policy since at least 1959.[33] But Longmore also notes that as the 1970s drew to a close, "advances in medicine and rehabilitation technology along with the computer revolution had rendered obsolete the dichotomy between independent living and work."[34]

Transformations within vocational rehabilitation in the 1970s should thus be understood as expansions of, rather than challenges to, the role of work in disability policy. By introducing an expanded conception of the imagined subject of rehabilitative intervention, including those with more "severe" disabilities, policy in the 1970s promoted and expanded conceptions of the range of disabled Americans who would be considered "employable," irrespective of the potential for their employability to lead to economic independence. Scotch writes:

> [d]espite congressional expectations that VR would help unemployed disabled individuals receiving cash benefits to reenter the workforce, effective relationships never developed among the various disability programs. As a result, few beneficiaries of income maintenance programs have gone to work through vocational rehabilitation programs.[35]

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[32] Paul K. Longmore, "The Disability Rights Moment: Activism in the 1970s and Beyond." In *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 103.

[33] Ibid., 112.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Scotch, 383.

Vocational Rehabilitation did not eliminate employment as the centerpiece of its rehabilitative practice because it lacked the infrastructure necessary to alleviate welfare doles as Congress desired. Rather, it began to value work more explicitly in terms of its aneconomic functions. Work might not lead disabled Americans to economic independence, but mobilizing productive capacities would become evidence of good citizenship.

This recalibration of rehabilitation policy emerged in tandem with the movement of rehabilitation "to the social and cultural realm rather than remaining exclusive to the medical sphere."[36] Elman argues that the 1970s witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of "rehabilitative cultural narratives," which she calls "rehabilitative edutainment."[37] This edutainment was rehabilitative both because it "asserted a therapeutic function for popular culture" by "addressing its teen characters in a tone that was more diagnostic or preventative than punitive" and by simultaneously "rehabilitat[ing] the image of formerly denigrated media forms, like television or paperback novels, as productive rather than damaging to youth citizenship development."[38] The displacement, or relocation, of rehabilitation from medicine to culture entailed a universalizing understanding of the subject of rehabilitative practice. "Representations of adolescence, sexuality, and disability, as sites of development, management, and investment," Elman argues, "helped to naturalize a culture of rehabilitation as coterminous with good citizenship not just for those deemed disabled—but for all of us."[39] Rehabilitative edutainment echoes some of the tenets of progressive-era rehabilitation, but as Elman deftly demonstrates, it distinguishes itself through an emphasis

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[36] Elman, 15.

[37] Ibid., 4.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 9.

on the cultural realm, interest in various forms of queer sexuality, and a focus on adolescence.

NTWH entered the story of rehabilitation amidst these developments in social policy and cultural practice. Like the modes of "rehabilitative citizenship" to which Elman attends, NTWH took disabled people's imagined futures as its principle rehabilitative object. NTWH also shares in common with Elman's archive a rehabilitative practice that knew rehabilitating the disabled subject also required rehabilitating spectators, industry professionals, and cultural practices. But unlike the cultural forms Elman analyzes, which emphasize the intersection of narrative and spectatorial practice, Curry's writings on NTWH obfuscate any substantial engagement with the workshop's theatrical repertoire. They position questions of dramatic narrative and form as peripheral to questions of performance, the actual *doing* of theatrical practice. This focus on practices over narratives was paramount within NTWHs multiple rehabilitative projects. Within the U.S. commercial theatre industry of the 1970s, Stanislavskian modes of actor training were hardly in need of rescue, but rehabilitating the ableism of actor training was integral to the workshop's broader concern with rehabilitating the genuine. Here, disability marks not that which demands rehabilitation, but that which must be accommodated in order to demonstrate that a given cultural practice has been rehabilitated. But this more expansive purview did not significantly alter the purpose of rehabilitation. The workshop enacted rehabilitation in the service of work. Work still functioned as the paradigm through which other rehabilitative goals became imaginable.

Examining the workshop's student population helps specify whose occupational realism and whose genuineness were at stake in these rehabilitative endeavors. Student populations materialized within NTWH's workshop rehearsal studios, productions, and cabaret venues throughout New York and New England, but they were also imagined and scripted by workshop faculty. During the workshop's early years, Curry was primarily concerned with "the orthopedically disabled and visually impaired" (7). By the late 1990s, a student with a psychosocial disability (agoraphobia) figured among those enrolled in NTWH classes, suggesting that they may have embraced broader strategies of pan-disability inclusion than those indicated by Curry's earlier writings.[40] This possible expansion coincided with the workshop's broadest shift regarding its target population: the prioritization of writing programs for disabled veterans from the late 1990s until the dissolution of NTWH in approximately 2010.

Curry's commitment to blind and physically disabled actors in particular derived from his dedication to educating students with different disabilities alongside one another and fostering an ethos of cross-disability collaboration. But it also evinces some of the workshop's political limitations. For example, when curating the composition of a given classroom, NTWH faculty emphasized a "distributed mix of disability," with a distribution for a class of ten students being approximately "five blind students, three wheelchair-bound students, and two amputees" (145). Through such a distribution, the workshop risked inadvertently reproducing pervasive hierarchies of disability that Curry elsewhere acknowledged. He highlighted, for example, the privileging of relatively mobile people with disabilities and deprivileging people with disabilities experiencing problems with incontinence, and described issues regarding "mental disability" as "difficult."[41] The workshop's boundaries, around which disability identities and embodiments are amenable for acting training, reveals much about how theatrical labor accrued such significant political and cultural purchase for disabled people, and to what ends.

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[40] Olivia Barker, "Center stage, with a message about disabilities 'Siciliano' a milestone for theater, mainstreaming," *USA Today*, 1 November 1999.

[41] Curry, 13.

The omission of intellectually and developmentally disabled actors structured the workshop's political and aesthetic purview. Consider an NTWH marketing brochure declaring that "In the past…We have assumed that since the handicapped are physically disabled, [we] assume that they are artistically and intellectually disabled as well" (115). The rhetorical strategy here is to challenge (mis)recognitions of physical differences as evidence of intellectual incapacity, and in so doing, to contest exclusion or discrimination on the basis of such physical difference. But in so doing, the brochure reinscribes intellectual ability as a form of difference that legitimates such exclusions. NTWH understood part of its mission to be the marshaling of artistic training and aesthetic resources for people with certain disabilities so that they might demonstrate their aesthetic educability, and by extension, their intellectual capacity. In so doing, this narrow segment of disabled Americans would inherit the right to theatrical work and cognate privileges of citizenship not previously accorded to them. The intellectual disabled are left behind in the process, bereft of artistic and political inclusion alike.

NTWH transportation policies further delimited the subset of disabled people who would have the opportunity to pursue acting training with the workshop. In an effort to "prepare [their] students for the real theatre world," NTWH declined to provide or arrange transportation for students to attend classes, rehearsal, or performances (133). Given the limited accessibility of New Yorks' public transportation infrastructure in the late 1970s, this policy had the effect of restricting NTWH to those with the economic resources to afford private transportation or those whose disabilities did not require accomodations in order to board a bus, enter a subway station, or negotiate city sidewalks (which would not have featured universal curb cuts in the workshop's early years). The effects of such a policy, in combination with the workshop's already narrow focus on physical disability and blindness, was complicit with "creaming," a colloquialism describing practices by which vocational rehabilitation programs prioritized clients who required the least significant accomodations.[42] In so doing, NTWH demonstrates how an outmoded rehabilitative ethos persisted in tandem with state-based rehabilitative transformations during this period.

Age provides a particularly informative lens through which to understand the workshop's assumptions about its students' socioeconomic class. NTWH eventually founded a mixed-ability children's theatre run by "a disabled woman" from its Maine campus, but students within the workshop's primary acting programs were between 25 and 27 years of age.[43] Curry calls this population "college age," as many of these students entered the workshop after completing years of physical rehabilitation following disabling car accidents as teenagers. Access to post-secondary educational opportunities and compulsory car ownership (within the American cultural imaginary, at least) had expanded radically in the post World War II period, to be sure. But Curry's use of college as a normative barometer to describe the age of NTWH's students shores up other policies and practices that delimited NTWH's presumptively middle-class student clientele.

The average age of the NTWH student population also emerges from the workshop's project of putting disabled people to work. Curry considered adults to be the appropriate student population for the workshop on the basis that "experiential training of student actors can be more beneficial if the student actors had more experiences (121).[44]

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[42] Longmore, 103.

[43] Curry, 12.

[44] This emphasis on experience derives from the Stanislavskian trajectory within which the workshop participates. In *An Actor Prepares,* Tortsov warns Kostya to "*Never allow yourself externally to portray anything that you have not inwardly experienced and which is not even interesting to*

This suggests a continuum in which age and experience enjoy a positive correlation, and by extension, that a subject's capacity for acting increases based upon the quantity of her experiences. In other words, increased age indexes increased experiences, which, in turn, index a subject with a greater propensity for acting. This attitude toward aging is less interesting for its questionable descriptive accuracy than for how it posits youth as a deficit relative to adulthood. The valorization of adulthood in terms of "experiences" accumulated proportionately to age emerges in contradistinction to pervasive cultural and political representations of youth as pathological (and thus "disabled") that proliferated in this period.[45] Curry also attributed the workshop's focus on adult students to concerns about the status of educational opportunities for "disabled adults" who, Curry noted, "were largely ignored by educational programs in general" (122).

Rehabilitating Occupational Realism

NTWH faculty agreed that disabled people would benefit from theatre training, but they rarely reached consensus regarding how and why such training would prove so beneficial. From the workshop's emergence in the late 1970s until its dissolution around 2010, debates about the value of acting training for disabled people intensified with regard to its therapeutic and rehabilitative valences. In the opening pages to his "Practical Philosophy," Curry suggests that he is open to theatre's rehabilitative possibilities but does not wish to forsake other rationales for valuing acting training for the disabled. He writes: "I postulate that a course in educational theatre need not prohibit students from preparing for

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you." "To reproduce feelings," Tortsov instructs, "you must be able to identify them out your own experience." Stanislavski, 31, 25.

[45] Elman, 1-19.

acting careers nor need a class in theatre education exclude students whose interests are manifestly humanistic and developmental" (4). This sentiment represented Curry's attitude at a particular moment in time, but would not continue to define the workshop's attitude toward the rehabilitative over the following decades.

Consider the following contrasting interpretations of the workshop's rehabilitative valences near the end of the workshop's institutional life. NTWH faculty member Alex McGuiness denied that the workshop had rehabilitative intentions, but he also admitted that it invariably generated some rehabilitative effects. "This is not therapy," McGuiness offered: "It's about building and rejuvenating a person's artistic life. And sometimes that has therapeutic consequences."[46] Bob Keyes of the *Portland Press Herald* described his understanding of the workshop's goals with reference to discourses of restoration and bodily wholeness: "The program is not designated to turn the veterans into playwrights or thespians, although that would be a welcome development. The goal, said the program's founder, is to make the veterans whole again by restoring the power of their own voice."[47] These divergent takes on the workshop's rehabilitative valences, rooted in McGuiness and Keyes' respective subject positions (an NTWH faculty member and a journalist interpreting Curry's claims for a reading public) prove instructive. While McGuiness represents the workshop as *potentially* and *accidentally* therapeutic, Keyes represents it as *primarily* and *purposefully* rehabilitative. Both perspectives decouple rehabilitation from job training, occupational status, or ambitions for future employment.

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[46] Donna Kornhaber and David Kornhaber, "The Wounds of War: Grim Experiences as Storytellers' Muse," *New York Times*, 30 July 2006.

[47] Bob Keyes, "Healing through arts; a Belfast theater workshop helps maimed veterans deal with loss," *Portland Press Herald*, 30 July 2006.

Other workshop faculty members mobilized different strategies for explaining the relationship between NTWH's professionalizing and rehabilitative missions. Ray DeMattis, for example, emphasized the workshop's focus on job training by disavowing any potential therapeutic valences. "We cannot and should not be drama therapists. We should put all our energy into making our students ready for professional jobs" (128). But whereas DeMattis framed the professional and the rehabilitative as incompatible, Curry himself understood the boundary to be far more porous:

> The idea of a disabled professional actor was so novel to the students that it seemed outside the realm of possibility. Hence, several students saw the value of being in the Workshop as self-improvement in the areas of poise, articulation and general sharpening of communication skills (129).

Curry's approach highlights theatre's therapeutic valences in the realm of "poise, articulation, and…communication skills," without foreclosing theatre as a form of labor and site of professional possibility for disabled people.

The workshop's acting curriculum, Curry argues, was both a form of job training for theatre in particular and rehabilitative with regards to communicative capacity and bodily comportment. By refusing to treat rehabilitation and professionalization as mutually exclusive ambitions, Curry participates within a longer history in which employment has figured as the desired culmination of rehabilitative resources and services. But this understanding of the workshop is primarily concerned with rehabilitating not the disabled subject's productive capacities, but rather her capacity for imagining a future that includes acting professionally. It is this rehabilitative project, the disabled subject's capacity for imagining (if not necessarily realizing) such a future, that this chapter examines in terms of occupational realism.

Rehabilitating the disabled's occupational realism was central to the workshop's mission and a key tenet of its normative project. Curry's understanding of rehabilitation and employment as mutually compatible was one of the many approaches to rehabilitation that NTWH faculty, staff, students, and critics articulated. I follow Curry's sentiment more extensively than I do the ambivalences I rehearsed above for two primary reasons. First, the competing accounts about the workshop's rehabilitative status contradict one other so acutely that it is difficult to get a sense of the historicity and the historical transformations that the workshop's takes on rehabilitation experienced over the course of its institutional life. Second, the practices through which NTWH attempted to rehabilitate its students' occupational realism pervade the workshop from Curry's earliest planning to its disbanding. These practices include a hypothetical (unrealized) professional repertory company for disabled actors, an insistence on the importance of role models, discussions of the generalizability of the skills students would acquire through acting training, and the multiple forms of labor that workshop students were invited, and sometimes compelled, to perform. Given this ubiquity, attending to the workshop's efforts to rehabilitate occupational realism illuminates the workshop's transformation of rehabilitative practices in general. After introducing the concept of occupational realism and NTWH's unique orientation toward rehabilitating it, I examine some of the practices through which the workshop attempted to rehabilitate occupational realism, with specific attention to the (desired) historicity of occupational realism as the subject of rehabilitative concern as well as the changing face of occupational realism within the workshop's political imagination.

The concept of "occupational realism" first emerged within sociology, behavioral psychology, and education in the 1950s and proliferated in the ensuing decades.[48] This

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[48] For a more thorough gloss on "occupational realism" – as both a field of discourse as well as an emergent aesthetic-political phenomenon in which artist-workers and worker-artists dissolve the distinction between aesthetic practice and occupational activity, see Bryan-Wilson, 40-41.

scholarship "discusses the discrepancy between levels of aspiration in adolescents or first-time job seekers and their 'actual' potential to achieve those aspirations."[49] Art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson has argued that these discourses reproduce racist and sexist expectations and presume class mobility to be almost nonexistent. For example, a middle-class adolescent (ostensibly nondisabled) white boy with impressive grades who expresses a desire to be a physician might be presumed to have good occupational realism, whereas a working class (ostensibly nondisabled) girl of color with similar ambitions might be presumed to have poor occupational realism. Concerns with occupational realism emerged in a postwar context that witnessed the broad scale reorganization of the labor force's racial and gender composition as well as the institutionalization of vocational rehabilitation within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. While discussions of disability do not figure prominently within this literature, concerns with the proper alignment between one's subject position and her career aspirations emerged coterminously with government practices concerned with developing the productive capacities of disabled citizens (namely, veterans) on an unprecedented scale. Discourses of occupational realism emerged simultaneously with state investments in the disabled's employability.

But there was a gulf between the rehabilitation offices and The Great White Way, and ambitions of being a professional actor could not but have signified the horizon of poor occupational realism for disabled people in the 1970s. Changes in American disability policy had only recently made it such that Americans could be thought of as employable, and thus, subjects of occupational realism at all, good, bad, or otherwise. As Bryan-Wilson notes,

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[49] Ibid., 40.

occupational realism proffers “the necessity of being *realistic about class limitations*.”[50] For disabled Americans who (then, as now) disproportionately experienced economic marginalization as the result of impoverishing income maintenance programs, employment discrimination, and inadequate access to education, class limitations were profound. But the “limitations” about which the disabled were supposed to be “realistic” were also corporeal, cognitive, and affective. Enduring assumptions about the disabled’s inability to act – an effect of what disability performance theorist Carrie Sandahl calls “the tyranny of neutral” in U.S. American actor training – and general aesthetic ineducability would have guaranteed that work as commercial performers would not have been within the bounds of good occupational realism.[51] Popular perceptions about the disabled’s inability to act and general aesthetic ineducability created obstacles for the disabled to develop ambitions that included waged work on the commercial stage. As Curry and his collaborators understood it, the absence of vocational programs for disabled artists further circumscribed the content of the disabled subject’s already narrow conception of her own possible career trajectories.

That NTWH targeted occupational realism for rehabilitative intervention was unique in terms of the scale and the direction of its rehabilitative impulse. Occupational realism’s efficacy as a concept is contingent upon its role in pathologizing maladjusted subjects who deign to enjoy career aspirations asynchronous with their subject positions and then enlisting educational professionals to reign her prospects back into alignment. But NTWH was unique in that it sought to rehabilitate disabled people’s occupational realism not principally by curtailing, but by *expanding* the boundaries of work within the futures that disabled people

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[50] Ibid., 41.

[51] Carrie Sandahl, “The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training.” In *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 255-68.

imagined for themselves. Additionally, NTWH addressed the disabled as rehabilitative subjects, but their rehabilitative efforts were irreducible to individualizing approaches that identified disabled people as the source of their own problems. NTWH understood disabled people's impoverished sense of occupational realism to derive from the discriminatory attitudes of theatre industry professionals and nondisabled spectators. Rehabilitating disabled Americans' occupational realism would require intervening upon these other subjects.

NTWH was not the first institution to work towards rehabilitating disabled people's occupational realism. Theatre historian Stephen C. Baldwin notes that prior to the founding of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in 1967 (a decade before NTWH was founded), performance was a central feature of largely working-class deaf social clubs, although "no one [deaf] ever dreamed of making acting a professional career."[52] NTD organizers who wrote grant proposals for VRA funding emphasized connections between the lack of opportunities for deaf actors in American theatre with the limited employment opportunities that deaf Americans faced more generally. An early grant proposal reads:

> Three-quarters of the deaf adult male working population and three-fifths of the deaf working women are employed in manual occupations…manual occupation was, and still is, a 'traditional vocational pigeonhole for the deaf.' To break this undesirable situation… something like a repertory theatre is needed.[53]

Developing this professional repertory theatre, then, was intended not only to provide employment to a limited number of deaf actors, but also to serve a public pedagogical function. The National Theatre of the Deaf would charge hearing audiences for the opportunity to watch deaf actors labor on stage, and in so doing, it would educate them about deaf Americans' capacities for "non-manual" work (an admittedly questionable

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[52] Stephen C. Baldwin, *Pictures in the Air: The Story of the Natural Theatre of the Deaf* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press), 4.

[53] Ibid., 14.

descriptor for a form of theatrical labor that aestheticized modified forms of American Sign Language in performance). Anticipating the ascendance of commercialized forms of affective and immaterial labor in the late twentieth century, this emphasis upon acting would represent the forms of labor to which the deaf could, and perhaps *should*, aspire.

OVR may have posed challenges to popular understandings for which d/Deaf Americans were suited more than a decade prior, but assumptions about disabled people's limited occupational realism endured well into the 1970s. At this time, Curry and his colleagues turned to "the Hempstead Board of O.V.R." to support the then-incipient NTWH (124). OVR administrator Lois Benjamin, a "very businesslike" wheelchair user, informed them:

> Our office almost never funds any training program in the arts. The only type of educational program in our guidelines that we fund is the kind that has a reasonable certitude that a job is waiting for our clients after their program. Computer programming is very big right now. It would be impossible for us with our present staff to evaluate how much talent a client might have in the arts. Even if we did have the capacity to evaluate the worth of the student/artist we couldn't guarantee him or her a job. Could you? (124)

Benjamin delimits "good" occupational realism for disabled people with reference to their likelihood of becoming employed, rather than their purported incapacity for arts work. Furthermore, Benjamin attributes blame to the OVR's "present staff," unable to adjudicate artistic merit. Elsewhere in New York at this time, vocational rehabilitation professionals through the HEW Region II Office were collaborating with the NEA to integrate arts professionals into the evaluation process and to help train vocational rehabilitation staff to serve disabled clients interested in serving arts fields.[54] This wariness about funding resources

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[54] HEW/NEA Meeting Minutes, 25 April 1978, Box 106, Folder "Department HEW – Thelma Schmones 1978, ND"; Lanni Latin Duke to "Advisory Committee on Careers in the Arts for the Handicapped," 12 May 1978, Box 106, Folder "Department HEW – Thelma Schmones 1978, ND," Ron Whyte Papers.

for arts employment, then, derives less from administrators' narrow conceptions of disabled people's occupational realism, than from how arts work brought into crisis their ability to discern the quality of a subject's occupational realism. Anxieties about the ineffability of artistic talent exacerbated OVR understandings of the lack of a market demand for artists and of the arts market as necessarily precarious. Instead of funding resources for disabled artists, they prioritized training for job opportunities for which there was "relative certitude of employment."

Major theatre industry professionals were outright hostile to the idea of training disabled people to work as actors, and because of this, they helped articulate the limits of their occupational realism. As Curry and his colleagues began conceptualizing NTWH, they sought industry professionals' support in mainstreaming disabled actors on professional stages. Responses to NTWH queries ranged from indignation at the suggestion that spectators "would ever want to see [disabled people]" to demands for evidence that such disabled actors would produce economic value (110-11). The reaction of Wendy Wasserstein, a feminist playwright renowned for her political liberalism, suggests the severity of industry hostility. NTWH co-founder Mimi Kennedy, then collaborating with Wasserstein, asked the playwright what she thought of the viability of their project. "Are you nuts?" Wasserstein responded, "I can't even convince Broadway executives of the value of women in leadership roles on Broadway" (111). Wasserstein's focus on commercial theatre's enduring sexism at the expense of disability inclusion locates disability activism and feminism as isolated scenes of political struggle, suggesting that (ostensibly nondisabled) women need to be given their due before disabled people become recognizeable as political subjects. For Wasserstein, the workshop's existence and its mission were simply untenable.

Countering such perceptions, leaders of NTWH knew, would require rehabilitating disabled people's occupational realism.

Attempts to found a professional repertory company for disabled actors represented the workshop's efforts at rehabilitating its students' occupational realism, and by extension, the occupational realism of disabled Americans more broadly. This repertory company never materialized, but even its hypothetical existence demonstrates how NTWH understood that it needed to incorporate audience members, including industry professionals, as well as disabled performers, as rehabilitative subjects. Curry's vision for NTWH did not originally include the existence of such a repertory company– he worried that segregated companies for disabled actors would allow other theatre professionals to continue ignoring disabled actors. He only changed his mind when it became clear that the theatrical marketplace was not greeting the workshop's alumni with open arms (164). He then realized that the underrepresentation of disabled people within the ranks of professional actors could not be attributed merely to a dearth of untrained disabled performers. In light of this, Curry developed a new goal: "establish[ing] a professional repertory company in order to demonstrate the capabilities of its disabled performers and thereby help change negative attitudes about the disabled population in America" (Abstract 2).

This interest in developing a professional repertory company laminates disability activism, work politics, the politics of representation, and rehabilitative discourses upon one another in a way that targets disabled people's occupational realism. Eventually, Curry hoped, the workshop's repertory company would be instrumental in "establish[ing] new audiences, new performers, new subjects for plays, and new characters" (13). But his early writings do not foreground the content of the work performed by the hypothetical company affecting the workshop's efforts to counter disability stigma. Curry instead hoped to counter disability stigma by "demonstrat[ing] the capabilities of its disabled performers." Change could be effected by putting disabled people's talent as actors on the theatrical stage, where, he hoped, others would notice their availability, potential, and status as workers. He writes:

> The entertainment industry effects attitudes and attitudes can effect change. By preparing disabled people to take their rightful place in the theatre world, disabled performers could establish themselves as fully professional in the industry and help change negative attitudes toward the disabled (12-13).

At no point does Curry identify the content of disability stigma. He nevertheless implies that disability stigma originates in the disabled's (perceived) status as non-workers. Their legibility as "fully professional," he maintained, would temper, even dissolve, such stigma.

Theatrically representing disabled people as workers proved to be a complicated political maneuver. It put the onus on disabled people themselves to counter ableist attitudes perpetuated by the nondisabled, and it risked reducing the humanity of disabled people to their productive capacities. Furthermore, the repertory company was a tautological strategy in that it sought to challenge disability stigma by representing disabled people as *already being workers*. Rather than challenging the legitimacy of stigmatizing disabled people for not working, the desired effect for the repertory company was to suggest that this stigma was fundamentally misconceived. The repertory company would create jobs for the disabled actors it hired and demonstrate to audiences that people with disabilities *could* work. But public displays of theatrical labor would also demonstrate to audiences that disabled people were already working.

To insist that disabled people were already workers was to intervene within popular understandings of the history of disability employment. NTWH's repertory company would challenge rehabilitative projects operating in the subjunctive, projects that point to the potential for actualizing disability employment in the future. In so doing, the workshop demands critical accounts of disabled workers in the past and present and insists that we attune our archives to account for their presence. NTWH's strategy here might be thought to anticipate Alison Kafer's push to attend to the informal economies in which disabled people participate in order to survive even as they engage in the "refusal of productivity."[55] To represent disabled people as workers rather than as potential workers, then, is to refuse to accept as transparent the role of disability in administering the welfare state and its materialization in practice—to refuse the idea that the state has fulfilled its obligations to its disabled citizens. This strategy also allowed the workshop to focus on work's aneconomic functions rather than wage-earning as a potential path to economic independence. Perhaps ironically, establishing the disabled as already being workers allowed the workshop to prioritize the *employability* and the occupational realism of its workers rather than their *employment*.

The workshop targeted occupational realism in part by understanding the hypothetical repertory company's hypothetical nondisabled audiences as in need of attitude adjustments. By including audiences within its rehabilitative purview, the workshop flipped rehabilitative scripts that marked disabled subjects themselves as the sites of intervention and repair. In the mid-twentieth century, the emergent "human relations" style of labor management understood the acquisition of a disability to invariably lead to "emotional maladjustment." It was this maladjustment that purportedly precluded disabled Americans' integration within the workforce.[56] Within Curry's flipped script, disabled actors temporarily occupied the position conventionally reserved for medical authorities and vocational

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[55] Kafer, 39.

[56] Ruth O'Brien, "Deform'd, Unfinish'd, and Maladjusted: The Psychoanalytical Model of Disability." In *Crippled Justice: The History of Modern Disabilitiy Policy in the Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 27-62, at 58.

rehabilitation professionals, as they became the means for, rather than the subjects of, rehabilitative intervention.

But rehabilitating disabled people's occupational realism would also require targeting disabled people themselves. A commitment to developing role models was one strategy through which the workshop addressed disabled people themselves as being responsible for developing a more capacious sense of what their future employment might entail. This focus on role models also demonstrates how NTWH sought for the focus on occupational realism to be a historically bracketed priority, an intermediary step in increasing the visibility of disabled actors, rather than an end unto itself. "Professional disabled artists," Curry notes, "could become role models for aspiring disabled students" (13). The logic was that the number and quality of students seeking entry into NTWH cohorts would improve proportionately with the increased presence of "professional" actors with disabilities on commercial stages. Role models could effect change at the structural level, radically expanding the modes of labor it was possible for younger generations of disabled Americans to "realistically" imagine. The figure of the role model articulates continuity between a subject having "realistic" career ambitions and that subject securing work in her desired field. This continuity, however, defers large-scale employment for disabled actors to future generations. It is in this regard that NTWH's efforts to rehabilitate occupational realism should be understood as a means to an end. Rehabilitating disabled American's occupational realism would, the workshop hoped, begin the process of enabling the disabled to secure work as actors.

Role models mediated contradictory claims that were central to NTWH's rehabilitative project: that it was imperative to create a future in which disabled people worked and that disabled people already worked in the present. The temporal logic of the future-oriented role model would seem to contrast the present-oriented (and audience-oriented) temporality of the workshop's other strategy for rehabilitating occupational realism: insisting, through theatrical performance, that disabled people were already workers. But the temporality of the role model actually tempers this focus on the future even as it also propagates it. The role-modeling that purportedly enables the disabled to imagine an occupational future inclusive of acting is itself structured as a theatrical relation. In their pursuit of a future with an expansive horizon of occupational possibilities, disabled people are to mimetically inhabit the work and career trajectories of the disabled actor role models who populate their less expansive present. By being called upon to follow role models, disabled people are invited to perform the same labor – mimicry – that actors perform. To provide disabled people with role models was thus to regard them as already equipped to perform the labor of the actor.

Curry's writings about NTWH never abandon the topic of work, but a concern with students' general productive capacities and everyday life eventually subsume his focus on commercial theatre. "When a blind woman comes in [to the workshop] and she has had her hair done," Curry says, "that's a success story. When someone goes on a job interview. When someone is asked to take over a meeting at work. When a guy starts to date."[57] Here, Curry measures the workshop's success in terms of its alumni's quotidian victories in the form of working ("go[ing]" on a job interview, "tak[ing] over a meeting") and heterosexual coupling (the "guy [who] starts to date" and the blind woman who "has had her hair done.") Curry's tethering of workplace and heterosexual "success" provides an opportunity to

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[57] Bill Ordine, "From Rejection Came Resolve to Help Others Stung By Prejudice, A Phila.-born Jesuit Created An Arts Program For The Disabled. It Has Drawn National Attention," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 6 March 2010.

extend lines of analysis within queer disability studies that address the imbrications of "compulsory able-bodiedness" and "compulsory heterosexuality."[58] In none of the activities that he describes do subjects (even provisionally) achieve heterosexuality or employment. Alumni achieve success by attending job interviews and going on dates. They do not achieve success by entering the workforce after a successful interview or entering the province of heterosexual monogamy and its attendant intimacies. Their success manifests not by them successfully securing employment or heterosexuality, but through their propulsion toward a deferred, unknown state of employment and/or heterosexuality. But alum are equally poised to fail at achieving the heterosexuality and employment toward which the workshop orients them. From the perspective of Curry, then – and by extension, from the perspective of the workshop – success was characterized by employability and heterosexuability, rather than employment and heterosexuality. The project of rehabilitating students' occupational realism, then, proved inseperable from rehabilitating their sexual realism, the quality of which was measured in resolutely heteronormative terms.

NTWH trained thousands of disabled actors, many of whom secured work as actors or in cognate professions. But the twenty-first century cultural landscape does not readily suggest that disabled Americans' "good" occupational realism would include theatrical labor. One need only consider the continued underrepresentation of disabled actors in commercial modes of theatre, film, and performance relative to the hyper-representation of disabled characters. But this is not to say that the workshop's efforts had little or no effect in changing the terms of occupational realism for people with disabilities. Emphasizing the viability of theatrical labor for people with disabilities served as a strategy through which to

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[58] Robert McRuer, "Introduction: Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence." In *Crip Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1-32.

expand the contours of occupational realism more broadly. Acting was to serve as a horizon for disabled people's occupational realism, but not its exclusive content.

The benefits ascribed to workshop participation, and the range of labor NTWH students were invited–and sometimes compelled–to perform, suggest transformations within the workshop's conceptualization of "good" occupational realism for disabled people. Consider a 1999 interview in which Curry reported the following: "for many of the students, NTWH is more a class in confidence-boosting than acting…Those communication skills are transferable to the marketplace."[59] This emphasis on the transferability of acting skills to the labor market might initially seem a far cry from the workshop's expressed goal of mainstreaming disabled actors on Broadway and in television. After all, Curry had previously critiqued the disproportionate emphasis on granting people with disabilities access to the arts in order to "sharpen [their] self-expression" and "to help overcome learning disabilities" (12). But this insistence on acting training as "transferable" was not exclusively a departure within the workshop's mission. As early as 1985, NTWH emphasized the transferability of the skills students learned in the workshop, which provided "the disabled population…the skills to develop themselves as more confident communicators in any profession" (121). For Curry, this emphasis on the acting workshop as a space for disabled people to develop their communicative capacities was rooted in the tradition of Jesuit theatre, which informed his educational and aesthetic philosophies alike. He writes, for example, that NTWH and Jesuit theatre were similar in that both "taught theatre to increase communication skills for the

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[59] Olivia Barker, "Center stage, with a message about disabilities 'Siciliano' a milestone for theater, mainstreaming," *USA Today*, 1 November 1999.

market-place" (164).[60] But this emphasis on communications-based forms of labor in the late 1970s also resonates with some theorists who emphasize the transformations within the organization and practice of work in the late-twentieth century not as affective labor or immaterial labor, but as "communicative" labor.[61]

"Transferability" included not only the extension of acting to other communicative domains and processes, but also the various forms of theatrical labor NTWH enlisted its students to perform. For example, Curry framed students' public performances to function as a marketing mechanism for the workshop. In Curry's estimation, word-of-mouth inquiries and disability subculture accounted for the most effective sources of finding new students, but "even if we get students from other sources, we always have a prospective student see a performance. Our students are NTWH's best spokespersons" (133). Casting students as

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[60] Curry understood early modern Jesuit theatre to be a valuable historical resource for NTWH for a number of reasons. For example, Franz Lang's *Discourse on Stage Movement* constituted a valuable artifact of Jesuit theatre traditions for Curry insofar as it signaled the shift within Jesuit theatrical practice in which the concern with training was matched by an interest in "theoretical or methodological discussion[s]" (55). This commitment to developing a pragmatic, textual means by which knowledge about theatrical practice might be transmitted between generations was something Curry hoped to replicate within the workshop in part by means of his "Practical Philosophy." But rehearsing Curry's genealogy of Jesuit theatre demonstrates how he understood Jesuit theatrical practice to not only be a historical resource for the workshop, but one particularly concerned with communication and the marketplace. In Curry's narrative, the early years of Jesuit theatre were characterized in part by a charitable dynamic that was itself both economic and affective. That, as James Pontanus notes, "'the clever acting of poor students on the stage often moves the wealthy to help them'" signaled both the successful affective force of performance and the charitable economic relation upon which Jesuit educational theatre depended (41). Curry also framed Jesuit theatre's accretion of increasingly sumptuous baroque qualities, "all of this grandiose theatricality" as central in "taking the plays out of the school and into the market place" (49). With NTWH and its focus on mainstreaming disabled actors onto commercial stages, Curry too hoped to deliver the disabled from charity to the market, although he turned to Stanislavski's method to make the affective production of the actors, rather than the grandiose theatrical apparatus, the factor that moves them to the market.

[61] Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2009).

"spokespersons" acknowledges the role they play in attracting new students to the workshop, but it also a claim that sits uneasily with their status as students within a job training program. The public performances in which students appeared as "spokespersons" were also a part of the curriculum for which the students had paid tuition fees, and they were the structure through which students showcased their talents to industry professionals. The role of spokesperson was not in addition to, but coterminous with, students' apperances within NTWH productions. By exhibiting the results of their acting training (for which they had paid), students also functioned as unpaid spokespersons tasked with the responsibility of recruiting future students to participate within the same economy of student-actor-spokesperson-worker. Certainly, having students perform informal and unwaged work as spokespersons shores up the workshop's goal for its repertory company to represent disabled people as already being workers. But whereas disabled actors would have been paid employees of the unrealized repertory company, they remained unremunerated for serving as NTWH spokespersons.

NTWH students fulfilled a number of other job functions within the context of the workshop. For example, students unable to pay their tuition in whole or in part received scholarships in the form of administrative labor, "whereby [they] can pay back their tuition in service, usually by working in our office" (134). But the changing face of the workshop's understanding of occupational realism for disabled people is most clearly evinced by Curry's enlistment of his students as bakers. In addition to his work as a Jesuit brother, theatre artist, and educator, Curry was an avid baker and cook. He published two cookbooks, *The Secrets of Jesuit Soupmaking* (1995) and *The Secrets of Jesuit Breadbaking* (2002), the proceeds from which supported NTWH.[62] Curry enlisted baking in the name of the workshop's financial sustainability in other ways as well. Under his direction, students collaborated in the making and selling of bread and other baked goods, such as "Brother Curry's Miraculous Dog Biscuits."[63] The decision to incorporate students as bakers concerns not only the workshop's bottom line, but also points to a shift within its efforts to rehabilitate disabled people's occupational realism.

Curry represents his rationale for training disabled actors to be bakers as being commonsensical, so straight forward as not to warrant further explanation: "I figure as actors who can't be waiters and waitresses, why don't I train the disabled to be professional bakers?"[64] This explanation carries with it the implicit assumption that actors supplement their intermittent and often un(der)paid work as actors by waiting tables. Waiting tables is not only a paradigmatic "day job" for actors, but a paradigmatic form of commercialized affective labor, a job in which "seeming to 'love the job' becomes part of the job; and

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[62] Brother Rick Curry, S.J., *The Secrets of Jesuit Breadmaking* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995) and Brother Rick Curry, S.J., *The Secrets of Jesuit Soupmaking* (New York: Penguin, 2002).

[63] Julia Szabo, "Trick of Treat; Dogs Have Choice, From Vegan To Chicken," *New York Post*, 7 August 2005. The timeline according to which the bakery was incorporated into the workshop's operations remains fuzzy. While Curry published his first cookbook in 1995, the first reference I have to the workshop participating in the sale of baked goods themselves comes from a *New York Times* article in 1999 which mentions baking happening at the Broome Street location of NTWH's Soho-based studio. The workshop's expansion to multiple campuses in Maine included the construction of a formally distinct bakery space. The bakery was, along with the art gallery, one of the workshop's first properties sold at foreclosure auctions (2005) when the workshop experienced prolonged financial duress. Continued news coverage of the workshop's baking operations in 2006 suggests that workshop may have continued to rely on baking sales as a source of income even after the dissolution and sale of its formal bakery. Tom Groening, "Belfast couple buys portion of NTWH; Owners plan hotel, restaurant," *Bangor Daily News*, 23 March 2005; Rita Delfiner, "Giving Vets Peace – Write Stuff Heals," *New York Post*, 17 July 2006.

[64] Cynthia Killian, "All You Knead is Loaf; Since Man Does Not Live By Bread Alone, This Guy Also Makes Cake," *New York Post,* 6 December 2000.

actually trying to love it…helps the worker in this effort."[65] Curry's reasoning as to why disabled actors would be unable to wait tables remains unclear. Perhaps he normalized the expectation that inaccessible restaurant layouts would preclude blind actors and wheelchair-using actors from supplementing their income through the same paradigmatic day job as their nondisabled counterparts. Whatever his reasoning, Curry's conclusion inadvertently reiterates tropes within the history of disability and work that have relegated disabled workers backstage: beyond the gaze of spectators, patrons and consumers.

And so the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped, an organization born of the dream to mainstream disabled actors on Broadway, an organization that once dreamed of founding a professional repertory company of disabled actors, eventually trained its actors to work as bakers. The workshop that variously understood its students as actors, spokespersons, arts administrators, and any number of other communicative workers, pursued this line of training on the basis that these students were unequipped to perform the labor nondisabled actors perform to supplement their precarious employment as actors. This seems a far cry from the late 1970s when Curry auditioned for that fateful mouthwash commercial in an effort to supplement his modest income as a graduate student and Jesuit brother. What, then, to make of this stark transformation?

Curry instituted the bakery component of NTWH out of a sincere desire to increase his students' employability and out of a legitimate desire to sustain the workshop economically. But this effort to train the disabled not (only) as actors but also as bakers signals a shift in the workshop's rehabilitation of occupational realism. Its rehabilitative project no longer focused on expanding its students' occupational realism by underscoring

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[65] Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6.

acting as the horizon of "realistic" possibility for their futures. It focused instead upon equipping its students to prepare for the precarity of theatrical labor, the infrequency with which acting opportunities might actually be remunerated with a wage. This shift narrows the boundaries of occupational realism for disabled people, encouraging them to prepare for a second shift in the kitchen as much, if not more so, than they prepared for commercial opportunities in theatre, film, and television. This transformation also evinces a version of occupational realism concerned with the economic function of work. This differed from the workshop's previous efforts to rehabilitate the disabled's occupational realism that often privileged future employability at the expense of any real engagement with the immediate material conditions of disabled life and work's relationship to economic justice, or even opportunity. The workshop's original investments in mainstreaming people with disabilities on commercial stages cannot be understood outside of the broader turn toward efforts to put disabled Americans to work in the 1970s and, in so doing, to relieve the welfare doles. That it was better able to focus on a future-oriented occupational realism than immediate employment speaks to at least some sense of an enduring social safety net for disabled Americans. But by the early 2000s, almost a decade after the institutionalization of workfare at the federal level, the workshop enjoyed no such luxury. In such precarious times, the disabled needed to pursue lines of training in which, to quote OVR administrator Lois Benjamin, there was "reasonable certitude" of securing employment (123).

Rehabilitating the Genuine

NTWH attributed disabled people's limited sense of what occupations were realistic for them to social attitudes that understood the disabled as aesthetically uneducable. The exclusion of disabled people from arts education and cultural life more generally led Curry to prioritize occupational realism within the workshop's rehabilitative agenda. But the workshop's rehabilitative priorities are irreducible to this concern with occupational realism. The exclusion of disabled people from the arts sparked other rehabilitative projects for the workshop. "The aesthetic experience can be one of the most genuine of human activities," Curry writes: "[yet] it is all too seldom recognized as an experience necessary to the development of a disabled individual's full potential of life" (102). Denying the disabled access to "aesthetic experience" further denied them the opportunity to "develop" their "full potential." This logic suggests that the nondisabled develop their "full potential" in part through access to "aesthetic experience," and that providing disabled people with similar aesthetic access would produce comparable developmental arcs. From this perspective, barriers to aesthetic experience are debilitating. Exclusion from aesthetic experience impedes development only insofar as it erects barriers to "one of the most genuine experiences." Aesthetic experience enables developmental narratives in which one moves from less genuine to more genuine (or ingenuine to genuine) and from "more profoundly disabled" to "less profoundly disabled" (or from disability to ability). Disability, like genuineness, emerges as a matter of degree.

The workshop understood the stakes of disabled people's experiences of exclusion within cultural realms to be especially high in light of the anxieties about the artificial, ingenuine, and fraudulent character of disabled people that proliferated throughout the 1970s. Disability theorist Ellen Samuels argues that investments in fixing "embodied social identities"—especially disability, which "functions as the trope and embodiment of true physical difference"—intensified in the mid-to-late twentieth century in part because of "a tremendous expansion of and corresponding backlash against the welfare state."[66] Desires to secure subjects' social identities as discrete, static, and knowable were spurred in part by anxieties that Americans might be consuming public assistance on fraudulent grounds. Samuels argues that practices of securing these fixed identities, what she calls "fantasies of identification," largely migrated from cultural production in the nineteenth century to "its current, twenty-first century realization as a highly institutionalized regulatory structure most visible in the workings of state bureaucracy and the law."[67] NTWH, a job training program for disabled actors adjacent to (but not part of) federal Vocational Rehabilitation programming, asks that we think about how the cultural production and state regulatory practices for fixing disability identity might be more porous than Samuels' theory allows.

That NTWH charged acting training with the task of delivering disabled people genuine aesthetic experience points to a paradox animating this rehabilitative project. At the same time that anxieties intensified regarding the disabled's potential falsity and artificiality – feigning disability and malingering for economic gain – the workshop enlists a perhaps surprising practice for helping produce disabled people as genuine: theatre. Putting disabled people to work as actors required drawing upon what theatre historian Charlotte Canning has, in a different context, called "antitheatrical theatre."[68] The workshop drew upon – and revised – legacies of Stanislavskian acting training in order to rehabilitate its students'

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[66] Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race.* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 1, 3, 9.

[67] Ibid., 2, 9.

[68] Charlotte Canning, "The Platform versus the Stage: Circuit Chataqua's Antitheatrical Theatre." *Theatre Journal* 50.3 (1998): 303-318.

relationship to the genuine.[69] They also revised his system in order to accommodate disabled actors. As they received and revised it, Stanislavski's system enabled them to rehabilitate the relationship between disability and the genuine as well as to rehabilitate disabled people's occupational realism. The workshop's take on Stanislavski required that they embark on both rehabilitative projects – the disabled as genuine and the disabled as employable – at once.

NTWH's turn to Stanislavski's system for its theoretical and methodological foundations required Curry and his colleagues to carefully connect Stanislavski's legacy to discourses of authenticity and the natural. Curry yokes the workshop's commitment to genuineness and authenticity with reference to "the natural" by reaching well beyond Stanislavski and into early Jesuit reception of Aristotelian natural law. The workshop's interest in "the nature of things" manifested primarily in the belief that "*as a thing is, so it acts*" (23-4, emphasis original). This insistence on a correspondence between being (ontology) and

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[69] Nicholas Ridout foregrounds Stanislavski's writings on "solitude in public" in order to foreground the actor as a particular kind of laborer who, since the advent of industrial capitalism, has not been privilege to the division of public life and private life modernity supposedly affords. He writes: "The actor is required somehow to represent, through some mediation of her own life experience, aspects of this private psychic space in the rationalized public sphere of the bourgeois commercial theatre. She is therefore required professionally to embody what is experienced for most of her class as an intensifying split between the public realm and the autonomous psyche: to do in public what most people are increasingly learning to make private" (45). For Ridout, this makes the actor a useful laborer with whom the think about continuities between (affective) labor under industrial and neoliberal capitalism. Feminist sociologist Arlie Hochschild similarly foregrounds Stanislavski within her study of flight attendants' emotional labor. Similarly to Ridout, Stanislavski allows Hochschild to examine the gendered dimensions of public and private and what it means for private feeling to become commodified, and for women to perform private feeling in public for a wage. She likens the flight attendant to the Stanislavskian actor insofar as she is disciplined to act *as if* the cabin of the aircraft were her own living room. For both scholars, Stanislavski helps illuminate the (historical) indeterminacy of the spaces of life and work that have accompanied the dissolution (read: privatization) of public life. Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Hochschild.

action (performative effects) informed the workshop's efforts to rehabilitate the disabled with a "genuine" theatrical practice.

Extending the implication of a thing "acting" as it "is" to theatrical performance requires some elaboration. Performance studies encourages explorations of the continuities between theatrical activity and ostensibly non-theatrical behavior. Richard Schechner has infamously defined performance as "twice-behaved behavior," and critical theorists from Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler have emphasized the iterability and citationality of performative acts.[70] Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider has extended this line of analysis by contesting the binaries of theatre/performance and theatricality/performativity, a move she makes in part by recourse to "Aristotle's rejoinder to Plato, [that] mimesis is what we *do*" (emphasis original).[71] This unmaking of and distinguishing between acting and doing undermines mimesis as exceptional, providing an alibi for Curry's curiously unmarked extension of Aristotle's natural law as a theory of theatrical activity.

Curry contextualizes his understanding of natural law as concerned with behavior both onstage and off by means of Stanislavski and his acting system. Stanislavski was "a pragmatic questioner in search of *truth in art*" whose commitment to the natural was consistent with Jesuit reception of natural law (72, emphasis original).[72] Stanislavski, Curry elaborates, "believed that Dame Nature was the greatest creative artist of all and that her fundamental laws were binding on all" (73). Stanislavski and early modern Jesuits articulated

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[70] Richard Schechner, "What Is Performance?" In *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 28-51; Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," *Limited, Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[71] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 18.

[72] Ibid., 72-3.

theories of the natural that are not entirely compatible with one another. Still, Curry emphasized their mutual "agree[ment] in seeing in human nature a basic norm to be followed by all human persons in all places at all times," describing this faith in such unchanging laws as "Stanislavski's most basic overriding assumption" (73-4). For Curry, Stanislavski in particular propagated continuities between theatrical and quotidian activity because of his concern with actors' moral conduct in everyday life, as he "wanted his actors and actresses to lead exemplary lives and tried to instill in them the social significance of their art" (86).

This commitment to a natural correspondence between being and acting presented disabled actors with certain opportunities while foreclosing others. For example, this take on the natural unmoored the capacity to act from disability status. If something (or someone) acts as it is, the question becomes how it acts (in what way, by what means, to what ends), rather than whether it acts. Natural law invested disabled people with capacities for acting and action, and in so doing, provided the workshop one strategy for critiquing systems of cultural exclusion that represented disabled people as artistically uneducable. When everyone and everything share a universal capacity for action, "being" disabled no longer constitutes a barrier to action. Yet this strategy insists upon disability as ontology, a choice that sits uneasily with strategies of disability activism that highlight the social construction of disability, refusing to conflate disability with a knowable and static "truth." NTWH rehabilitated the disabled as genuine by drawing upon Stanislavski's acting system as well as by drawing upon ontological understandings of disability.

The insistence that action corresponds with being grants the capacity to act while it also constrains the field of potential actions. But two factors temper the extent to which this commitment to the natural should be understood to circumscribe disabled actors' potential actions. Because Curry interprets natural law as universally applicable, the narrowing of the parameters of a thing's potential actions applies to the nondisabled as much as the disabled. This circumscription need not disproportionately affect the disabled, although, as Mel Chen has demonstrated, "people with cognitive or physical disabilities" are often "stereotyped as passive" and thus regarded as being outside "the calculus of animacy."[73] That a natural correspondence between being and action informs how disabled people come to be incorporated in theatre suggests how the stakes of such commitments to the natural vary depending upon disability status. But NTWH further tempers the narrow circumscription of a subject's potential by adopting a capacious ontology of disability. The workshop, Curry writes, "believed the disabled person should have the opportunity to full develop his or her talents" (116). He elaborates: "This assumption that a disabled person should fully develop *as a disabled person* is at one time both Aristotelian and Ignatian in principle. Both Aristotle and Ignatius believed that *as a thing is, so it must grow*" (116, emphasis in original).

This suggestion that disabled people develop *as* disabled (rather than developing toward ability) imbues disability with a capacious ontology and thereby mitigates what might initially seem limiting about the disabled only being able to "act" as they "are." But it also contradicts the workshop's understanding of disability as produced by exclusion from aesthetic experience. According to this line of thinking, a disabled subject's genuineness and disablement are proportional to one another, and the project of rehabilitating genuineness was a project of developing from disability toward ability. Taken together, these two etiologies of disability represent a constitutive contradiction within the NTWH's rehabilitative project.

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[73] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 3.

Allow me to explain. Curry's attribution of disability to a subject's exclusion from aesthetic experience echoes what disability activists and scholars refer to as a "social model" of disability.[74] From the perspective of the social model, disability is produced through attitudes, inaccessible physical environments, and routine processes of social exclusion. But Curry's invocation of the natural depends upon an understanding of disability as ontological. Such an approach more closely approximates the medical model of disability (which disability activists and theorists oppose), which regards disability as an individual deficit: the medical fact of a person's impairment. Activists developed the social model (which has become subject to its own share of critiques in recent years) in part because of how the medical model regards disabled people's exclusion as inevitable, the result of the enduring, purportedly stable medical truths devoid of sociocultural and historical specificity. According to the medical model, disability can only transform with recourse to curative practices, and in so doing, becomes ability. For NTWH, combining a social model of disability (the production of disability through exclusion from aesthetic experience) with a medical model of disability (disability as ontology, stable, factual, true) becomes yet another strategy for rehabilitating the disabled as genuine.

The workshop's commitment to a natural correspondence between being and action suggests that its students – who *were* disabled – *acted* disabled. That the disabled actor *acts* as she *is* suggests a perfect lamination of acting upon being, rendering acting and disability inseperable from one another. By extension, the disabled actor in performance produces actions, signs, and meanings that the nondisabled actor does not. But a commitment to this correspondence is hardly self-evident from the workshop's performance practices. Faculty

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[74] Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability." In *The Disability Studies Reader*. Ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 214-221.

member Ray DeMattis offers an ambivalent take on the workshop's interest in the disability status of its students. With their first public performance for industry professionals, an original musical revue titled *Good Times Café*, the workshop would "neither focus in on the disabilities of the actors" nor "simply ignore them" (157).[75] DeMattis decided that the workshop would identify some semiotic middle ground and "use the disabilities to enhance the authenticity of the piece wherever possible" (157). The implication here is that the production will draw upon actors' disabilities as resources insofar as they can help close the gap between theatrical representation and meanings "internal" to the revue as written. Disabled people had long been excluded from experiences of the genuine as a result of their exclusion from aesthetic experience. But for NTWH, disability became an authenticating – perhaps genuine-ing – resource.

Curry's explanation for how disability became a resource for theatrical performance echoes DeMattis' sentiments. NTWH, he writes, is

> about presenting talent, not presenting disability…Disabled people can produce instant drama just by entering a room. The themes of disability that we work through, in regard to our playwriting sessions, are totally authentic, totally wonderful, totally filled with drama, because conflict is the stuff out of which theater is made.[76]

But there is also something incongruous about this investment in not "presenting" disability and yet tasking disability with visibly "produc[ing] instant drama." If disability necessarily and inevitably produces conflict, and "conflict is the stuff out of which theatre is made," then disability authenticates theatre because it facilitates theatre becoming itself.

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[75] There is a discrepancy between the workshop's expressed goals (to train disabled actors for "legitimate" theatre) through their revision of Stanislavski's system, and the fact that their first public performance for industry professionals takes the format of a revue, a paradigmatic form of "illegitimate" theatre.

[76] Curry, 8.

In order to develop disability's authenticating function for theatre, NTWH drew upon Stanislavski's system, a mode of actor training preoccupied with issues of disability and the authentic. Variants of Stanislavski's teachings have proliferated in acting studios and university classrooms since the Moscow Art Theatre toured the United States in the 1920s with Stanislavski at the helm. They have gained increasing traction with the ascendence of method acting and the hegemony of realist drama in U.S. commercial theatre since the mid-twentieth century. Given its own commitment to mainstreaming students on commercial stages, NTWH's derivation of its actor training program from Stanislavski is perhaps unsurprising. But the workshop's pursuit of a Stanislavskian geneaology was also inflected by an emergent model of neoliberal governmentality in which the stakes for (re)aligning the disabled with the authentic was paramount. In this context, Stanislavski's system proved amenable for rehabilitating the disabled as genuine because of its twin understandings of disability. In Stanislavski's writings, disability is both emblematic of artifice and emblematic of the real. But the NTWH's acting training program was not a simple transposition of Stanislavski's system, which was replete with ableist perspectives on the disabled actor's capacity to act. At the same time that the workshop ventured to rehabilitate disabled actors' authenticity, it attempted to rehabilitate Stanislavski's acting system towards less phobic, more disability-positive ends. Rehabilitating Stanislavski exceeded practical concerns with adapting his system to accommodate the workshop's blind and physically disabled students. Social systems and cultural practices, rather than disabled people themselves, needed rehabilitation, and they needed it in accordance with disabled rather than nondisabled norms.

Stanislavski's writings on actor training are rife with discussions of disability. Here, I track a few of the primary currents of disability as they concern theatre, artifice, and the real in Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, which figures prominently in Curry's, "A Practical

Philosophy," and is one of the primary means by which Stanislavski's system has circulated over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A fictional young actor named Kostya narrates *An Actor Prepares*, recalling a year of studying the curriculum of a director named Tortsov, a thinly veiled surrogate for Stanislavski himself. The novel-manual charts Kostya's progress from playing the title character in Shakespeare's *Othello* through highly conventionalized histrionics (complete with cake batter blackface) to learning the key tenets of Stanislavski's system, including emotion memory, solitude in public, and concentration of attention. Disability figures in these pages through representations of corporeal, affective, and sensory differences that manifest in Tortsov's acting class, instances of temporary disablement produced by acting itself, the presence of disabled characters in various acting exercises, and assumptions of normative bodily ability and capacity. Reviewing this sampling of ways that disability is constitutive of Stanislavski's system helps demonstrate the complexities NTWH encountered in its efforts to marshal this system as a genuine-ing methodology for disabled actors.

Consider Tortsov's resolute commitment to ablebodiedness when Kostya experiences the loss of bodily autonomy while rehearsing a scene from *Othello*. "In spite of myself," Kostya reports to the class, "my hands, arms, legs, face, facial muscles and something inside me all began to move."[77] Tortsov responds by informing the students that "*In order to express a most delicate and largely subconscious life it is necessary to have control of an unusually responsive, excellently prepared vocal and physical apparatus*."[78] Tortsov configures vocal and physical control as a necessary precondition for acting and notes that autonomy is far from ordinary

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[77] Stanislavski, 2.

[78] Ibid., 17.

but "unusual," and as such, must be cultivated through extensive preparation. The pursuit of such an "unusually responsive" corporeality is simultaneously the baseline for the Stanislavskian actor to work as an actor and a project of endlessly deferred aspiration, expanding the domain, spaces, and working hours of the actor far beyond his time at the theatre. Tortsov informs his class that this need for such a sensitive and robust apparatus is "*why an actor of our type is obliged to work so much more than others*, both on his inner equipment, which creates the life of the part, and also on his outer physical apparatus, which should reproduce the results of the creative work of his emotions with his precision."[79]

The system's concern with bodily control also functions as a strategy for avoiding disability and workplace injury.[80] While rehearsing a scene from Henrik Ibsen's *Brand*, a muscle spasm leads Kostya to "graz[e] an artery" with a prop, and he ends up "in bed for

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[79] Ibid.

[80] There are rare moments in which *An Actor Prepares* positively valences disability. Despite Stanislavski's occularcentrism and assumption of visuality as the means of accessing past memories and the material world of the theatrical present, there is a scene in which Kostya experiences temporary disablement in a way that he understands as beneficial to his performance. The technological apparatus of modern theatre – "footlights, headlights, and spotlights" momentarily "blind" Kostya and make him "feel protected from the public" (11). "For a moment," Kostya reports, "I breathed freely but soon my eyes became accustomed to the light, I could see into the darkness, and the fear and attraction of the public seemed stronger than ever" (11). This experience of temporary blindness is a sighted subject's fantasy about blindness providing a luxurious shield from spectatorial access. But following Kostya's suggestion that blindness is both caused by the theatrical apparatus and which has the effect of curing the problem of the audience on the other side of the proscenium arch, and Tortsov's insistence that actors deliberately concentrate their attention away from the audience rather than experience such "protection" through accidental temporary disablement, we might perversely read Stanislavski's insistence on circles of attention as not only trafficking in ocular ability and visual acuity, but as a tactic of strategic blindness. (Circles of attention are, certainly, as much about obscuring portions of the visual field as much as they are about accessing it). In light of Tortsov's claim that "the reason lies in the necessity of doing our artistic work in public where theatrical artificiality is constantly warring with truth," temporary blindness, by articulating a protective curtain, seems to be able to help produce truth.

some days."[81] This injury, ostensibly evidence that Kostya has yet to develop a sufficiently sophisticated physical and vocal apparatus, incites a shift in Tortsov's curriculum. He changes from a focus on concentration and circles of attention to practices for detecting bodily tension and working toward its eventual eradication through relaxation:

> *You cannot, at the very beginning of our work, have any conception of the evil that results from muscular spasms and physical contraction.* When such a condition occurs in the vocal organs a person with otherwise naturally good tones becomes hoarse or even loses his voice. If such contraction attacks the legs, an actor walks like a paralytic; if it is in his hands, they grow numb and move like sticks. The same sort of spasms occur in the spine, the neck, and the shoulders. In each case they cripple the actor and prevent him from playing. It is the worst of all, however, when this condition affects his face, twisting his features, paralyzing them, or making his expression turn to stone. The eyes protrude, the taut muscles give an unpleasant look to the face, expressing quite the contrary of what is going on inside the actor, and bearing no relation to his emotions. The spasms can attack the diaphragm and other organs connected with breathing and interfere with proper respiration and cause shortness of breath. This muscular tautness affects other parts of the body also and cannot but have a deleterious effect on the emotions the actor is experiencing, his expression of them, and his general state of feeling.[82]

Tortsov elaborates the debilitating effects of muscles spasms – disfigurement, paralysis – and claims that "in each case they cripple the actor and prevent him from playing." Being "cripple[d]" prevents the actor from "playing," prevents him from signifying the inner life of his character, from working. This provides the logical conclusion to Tortsov's earlier contention that the cultivation of a sensitive "vocal and physical apparatus" is a necessary precondition for performing the actor's labor.[83] Whereas an unusual degree of control over

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[81] Ibid., 103.

[82] Ibid., 104.

[83] Tortsov's conflation of paralysis and crippledom with the inability to act makes it difficult to recuperate other moments in *An Actor Prepares* that suggest that Stanislavski's system might be able to incorporate disabled actors. Consider the repetition of scenes grappling with stillnesss and action, scenes that refuse to conflate stillness with passivity. This insistence on the gap between "inner intensity" and "physical immobility" might seem compatible with a system of theatre capable of granting agency, activity, and interiority to actors with a range of physical disabilities and their respective movement vocabularies.

one's body enables one to work as an actor, the lack of such control yields disabling consequences. And this disablement makes doing the work of the actor impossible. Disability not only coincides with, but also causes, the failure to play.[84]

Slippages between compulsory ablebodiedness and more phobic orientations toward disability manifest within the system's insistent focus on visuality as a necessary resource for acting, an extension of the pervasive occularcentrism within the history of Euro-American theatre. Consider Tortsov's take on how actors should cultivate an appropriately robust "emotion memory," the process by which they draw upon affective material analogous to the experiences of their characters.[85] Emotion memory, Tortsov informs the students, requires "giving a coherent account of your whole life in terms of images you remember."[86] The system's insistence on compulsory sightedness devolves into more expressly ableist registers. Within this system, the work of acting not only assumes a sighted actor: compromised vision actually impedes the ability to act. During an exercise concerned with

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"Frequent physical immobility," Tortsov elaborates, "is the direct result of inner intensity, and it is these inner activities that are far more important artistically…*On the stage it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly*" (39). Re-reading this scene in light of Kostya's injury clarifies that stillness can only be invested with intensity and agency to the extent that such stillness is deliberately pursued and chosen, and Stanislavski's system seems unable to understand the disabled as deliberative and choosing.

[84] There is perhaps some promise in the fact that Kostya's acquired disability does not render him aesthetically inedcuable. Following his disablement, students (and occasionally instructors) visit Kostya to relay the lessons they learned and teach him acting exercises he can perform from the confines of his bed. (Notably, Kostya narrates almost the entirety of this chapter from his bed, and this is one of the only scenes in *An Actor Prepares* that takes place outside of the space of the theatre). This faith in his theatrical educability may have derived from the fact that his disablement was always presumed to be (and later, proves to be), temporary.

[85] Ibid., 180.

[86]Ibid., 70.

establishing differently scaled "circle[s] of attention," one of Kostya's classmates, Grisha, focuses his attention on a painting along the back wall of the theatre.[87] The Assistant Director quizzes Grisha about the subject of the painting in an effort to test the depth of his concentration and his attention to detail. Grisha proves unable to identify the painting's subject, and eventually confesses that he is "short-sighted."[88] The Assistant Director does not accept this as a justification.[89] By dismissing Grisha's rationale and interpreting his failure to identify the painting's subject as incompetence, the Assistant Director demonstrates that this system is unable to accommodate sensory differences. The problem has less to do with the focus on circles of attention than it does with the fact that the instructors are only able to adjudicate their students' success or failure with reference to their visual acuity.

To Tortsov's dismay, Kostya and his classmates experience (and acquire) disabilities over the course of their training, but Tortsov also enjoins them to perform disability as defining attributes of the characters they inhabit on stage. In one exercise, Tortsov works to induce his students to "ac[t] with a motive" rather than "copy passions or copy types" through a series of predetermined, conventionalized physical and gestural manifestations of affective display.[90] Tortsov requires the students to "live" these types rather than copy them, and he positions copying as not only a threat to authenticity but (variously) life, living, and the live. Tortsov instructs his students to achieve authenticity (and liveliness) by occupying the on-stage apartment as if a "man who became violently insane" and subsequently escaped

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[87] Ibid., 89.

[88] Ibid., 88.

[89] "Short-sightedness" is just one among the many justifications (or, from his perspective, excuses) that the Assistant Director is unwilling to accept for failing at this exercise.

[90] Ibid., 49, 43.

"a psychopathic ward" were just outside the door."[91] Disability also figures at the level of character in exercises involving Henrik Ibsen's *Brand.* The play features a character with an amalgamation of physical and cognitive disabilities, variously described as "a moron," a "half-wit," and "a hunchback."[92] These two examples suggest a breadth of disability representation (psychosocial, affective, cognitive, and physical) and fascination within Stanislavskis' text, perhaps sufficiently diverse so as to seem to have little in common with one another.

Tortsov's repeated invocations of disabled characters in exercises to prompt his students to authentically respond to an imagined set of circumstances is hardly coincidental. *An Actor Prepares* explicitly identifies the same actor, Vanya, playing both the madman and the half-wit.[93] That *An Actor Prepares* associates a single actor (and only that actor) with the representation of disabled characters exemplifies a commitment to the correspondence between being and action in which Curry was so interested. Tortsov discouraged his students from "copying" types as an acting methodology, but he nonetheless used types as a category for thinking about an individual actor's representational capacity. "Some actors do not fully realize," Torstov informs his students, "the limitations placed on them by nature."[94] He

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[91] Ibid., 48.

[92] Ibid., 80, 157.

[93] I do not mean to conflate any of these differences, or to reproduce ableist signifying systems that insist upon cognitive difference manifesting visually. At the same time, I want to be careful not to reproduce the equally ableist disavowal of cognitive and or psychosocial disability that often arises when critics insist upon decoupling physical disability from other modes of disabling difference, a corrective that is able to embrace some modes of difference but not others, and in which intellectual and cognitive disability is always placed on the wrong side of the boundaries of acceptable difference.

[94] Ibid., 318.

elaborates: "The comedian wants to play tragedy…This can only result in forcing impotence, stereotyped, mechanical action."[95] The transgression of type was not only undesirable: it resulted in failure for violating – as Curry's interest in the natural would have it – the correspondence between being and action.

An Actor Prepares both warns against transgressing type – against not "acting" as one "is"–and repeatedly delegates the representation of disability to a single actor. In a sense, then, Vanya *was* disabled. This contradicts other moments in Stanislavski's text that conflate the acquisition of disability with the incapacity to act. The representations of disability within Stanislavski's oeuvre are largely beyond recuperation for disability politics in any predictable sense: they are neither the methodologies nor the dramatic repertoires disabled artists and activists would want to prioritize. But casting a single character as multiple disabled characters also suggests a capacious ontology of disability that challenges ableist conflations of disability with the incapacity to act elsewhere in the text.[96]

An Actor Prepares also repeatedly yokes disability to the faux. In a representational economy that so values the authentic, the genuine, the real, and the live, Tortsov instructs actors to avoid disablement at all costs. Disability and artificiality are coextensive to the point

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[95] Ibid.

[96] *An Actor Prepares* imbues disability with a much more capacious ontology than it does other identity positions that it frames in resolutely narrow terms. Tortsov's insistence that actors determine their characters' objectives with reference to the given circumstances of the play suggest how individual identities are produced by sociocultural and historical circumstances. But this often serves to buttress ontological understandings of social identities rather than critical engagement with them. Consider Tortsov's invocation of gendered stereotypes in a rehearsal for a scene from Ibsen's *Brand*: "men …will appreciate more readily the psychology of a crusader for an idea….the delicacy of feminine and maternal love is closer to [women]" (136).

that the text understands artifice itself to be disabling.[97] "Avoid falseness," he tells his students, "especially avoid everything that runs counter to nature, logic, and common sense!"[98] Such artifice, Tortsov notes, "engenders deformity, violence, exaggeration and lies."[99] More specific references to disability further buttress this construction of disfigurement, excess, and the false as mutually determining. Tortsov elaborates sensory normativity and organic corporeality as prerequisites for acting:

> "We are so constituted that we need all of our organs and members, heart, stomach, kidneys, arms and legs. We are uncomfortable when any of them is removed and replaced by something artificial, a glass eye, a false nose or ear or tooth, a wooden leg or arm. Why not believe the same of our inner make-up? Artificiality in any form is just as disturbing to your inner nature. So go through you exercises every time you are to do anything creative."[100]

Speaking from the vantage point of an amorphous and undefined "we" (actors in this system? all spectators?), Tortsov contends that "we" are made "uncomfortable" when "real" bodily organs – whether sensory organs or haptic extremities – are replaced with prosthetic surrogates. Here, the purported discomfort of encounters with prosthetic forms of embodiment is asked to stand in for undesirability of an artificial interior life.

Within a system preoccupied with the real and the authentic, the successful avoidance of disability serves as a metonym for the successful avoidance of artifice. In the opening pages, Tortsov castigates Kostya for his stereotyped and conventionalized

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[97] There is one moment in which Tortsov understands lying to be a resource rather than a liability for an actor in this system. Sometimes, he notes, he finds that he has to lie (in terms of emotion memory, given circumstances, and the like) when he is not sufficiently "attract[ed]" to a character and finds his "creative faculties…paralyze[d]" (61-2). Notably, in order for lying to be a resource, it needs to not only be disarticulated form disability, it needs to cure it.

[98] Ibid., 176.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., 286-7.

performance as the title character in *Othello*. Kostya confesses that he "didn't invent anything new…merely repeated what I had done yesterday."[101] Tortsov later instructs Kostya and the other students that acting within this system strives to eradicate the mimetic gap between self and character, that "to play truly means to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role."[102] "We must play ourselves," he informs them later, "*always and for ever, when you are on the stage, you must play yourself*."[103] When you "play yourself," Tortsov elaborates, "it will be in an infinite variety of combinations of objectives, and given circumstances which you have prepared for your part, and which have been smelted in the furnace of your emotion memory."[104] This emphasis on playing oneself exemplifies the idea of acting as one is, and it does so in a way that affords the self an elastic ontology. This approach exemplifies Curry's suggestion that the disabled invariably must act as they are, and that the contours of the being within which they act are necessarily elastic and expansive.

This compulsory ablebodiedness challenged Curry's ability to recuperate Stanislavski's system for the NTWH's acting methodology. "The various approaches to actor training," Curry writes, "work through five operative senses and assume no physical disabilities. There is at present no method adapted to train the visually-impaired and orthopedically disabled" (138). He does not reference Stanislavski by name here, but his emphasis on the "five operative senses" makes this clear. Curry earlier cites Stanislavski's *My Life in Art*:

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[101] Ibid.,4.

[102] Ibid., 15.

[103] Ibid., 192.

[104] Ibid.

> ‘All men are forced to put food in their mouths, to hear with their ears, to see with their eyes, to breathe with their lungs, and all actors without exception must receive creative food according to the laws of nature, must treasure what they receive in their intellectual and emotional memory, must rework the material in their artistic imagination, according to well known laws that are incumbent upon us all, must give birth to the image of the human spirit, and having lived them over, incarnify naturally.’ (75)

Curry attributed the absence of actor training methods attuned to disabled embodiment to actor training in general, but it was Stanislavski’s system in particular, and not only acting training in general, that required rehabilitation.

Developing an acting practice accessible to disabled actors meant practical changes such as providing blind students with “scripts in Braille and large print” and cultivating an “unencumbered space” that would allow students who used wheelchairs to maneuver with ease (139). These practices demonstrate how rehabilitating Stanislavski’s system required pitting its internal contradictions against one another rather than radically transforming it. “Stanislavski,” Curry argued, “believed that an actor did violence to honesty by ignoring his body and the physical characteristic of his character” (98). NTWH faculty devised an actor training program to restore “honesty” to disabled actors by acknowledging and accommodating (some) corporeal and sensory differences, and in so doing, sought to restore honesty to Stanislavski’s system as well. “It must be remembered,” Curry writes, “that all exercises in class will be distinctly fashioned by each student[’s] physical and spiritual abilities. Class work must always look towards the final goal of NTWH: to be the best possible artist they can become by being faithful to their own nature” (155-56).

Like Tortsov’s students in *An Actor Prepares*, the workshop’s students practiced a number of acting exercises before advancing to scene study. Exercises concerned relaxation, kinesthetic awareness, declamation, improvisation, and the physicalization of emotions, all targeted to help students “use their entire bodies as a communicating instrument” (152).

Through these exercises and skills-building practices, the workshop hoped, the disabled students would "gain control of parts of [their] bod[ies]" and acquire competence in "articulation" and "meaning," all in the service of "expression" (141). This emphasis on acquiring theatrical skill in service of expressing an implicitly stable, pre-determined self echoes Stanislavski's claim that playing a character is always a matter of playing an iteration of oneself. That theatre training might provide disabled actors with increased skills regarding "self-expression" also became one of Curry's primary defenses of the transferability of acting training to other domains of the labor market as well as domains of everyday life not explicitly concerned with work (12). The workshop did not teach these skills simultaneously, but within a hierarchy that moved from bodily awareness and self-expression toward "more formal class work in improvisation and scene study" (155). Students only advanced to this level once they "[were] comfortable with Stanislavsky's thesis that a human being's psychological life—mood, desires, feelings, intentions, ambitions—is expressed through physical action" (155). Students' progress would be evaluated through a formal process that Curry institutionalized. A jury of three NTWH staff assessed "enthusiasm, confidence, articulateness, nature and extent of disability, range of physical movement, poise, general appearance and receptivity" (143). This adjudication was not about passing or failing students or determining their ability to continue on with the workshop, but rather sought to "monitor the students' potential" for professional careers in theatre (143).

Consider the following examples as paradigms for how the workshop developed a Stanislavskian-based acting methodology that accommodated disabled actors. Curry was concerned with disabled actors' affective intelligibility. The workshop emphasized training disabled actors to have "the proper physical response to an emotion so that it can be read clearly by the audience" (142). Curry insists that an actor's "physical response" (rather than say, vocal tenor) serves as the primary site of affective production that audiences read. This assumes a sighted, and perhaps otherwise nondisabled, audience. That the disabled actor needs to be trained to produce physical responses legible to nondisabled audiences suggests an anxiety about competing affective norms attributable to dis/ability status. Affective intelligibility would be a primary concern for any company operating within a realist acting tradition, but Curry's concern suggests that the stakes were particularly high when dealing with the workshop's disabled students. According to this logic, the disabled were at a distinct disadvantage in developing the robust physical instrument Stanislavski's system demanded for them to communicate with (nondisabled) audiences in a meaningful way.

Curry's writings on pantomime and gesture betray anxieties about the disabled's communicative capacities as challenges to authenticity. Pantomime excercises, Curry writes, allow "students [to] discover their physical limits, as well as their physical possibilities. The student learns that his own body even with limitations is one unified organism, functioning as one unit in a life response" (151). Pantomime provides a practice through which actors can glean what is physically possible for them and creates the boundaries of a coherent self: pantomime helps actors learn how they might authentically manifest in theatrical performance. Yet Curry frames gesture, the basic element of pantomimic enactment, as posing a particular challenge to disabled actors, perhaps the paradigmatic problem for disabled actors' legibility in mainstream theatre spaces. Curry's example relates what he understands as a challenge faced by blind actors in particular, although his concern has applications and resonances with other disabilities as well. He writes:

> Gesture presents more of a problem than perhaps is immediately obvious. Gesture is learned through imitation and the blind students do not have this luxury in their education. Oftentimes this lack of knowing how they are 'read' by sighted people is a strong motivating factor for the blind student to come to the Workshop. They ask to be taught stereotypical gestures to match their emotions. Stanislavsky taught that an

> action must flow from an active verb where the gesture or action expresses precisely and logically the end the actor wished to achieve. (153)

Consider some of the assumptions undergirding Curry's argument that blindness thwarts imitative capacity, or that purportedly unconventionalized blind gestures present obstacles for disabled actors to overcome. For Curry (following Stanislavski), precise gestural imitation evinces the disabled actor's physical ability to communicate with a sighted audience. It also evinces the actor's psychological and intellectual capacity as well, demonstrating a conventionalized logical alignment between a subject's intention and the gesture she physically manifests.

The workshop's willingness to train blind students interested in learning stereotyped gesture seems oddly reminiscent of the art of representation, the acting style to which Stanislavski counterposed his practice. But an emphasis on the alignment between physical gesture and psychologically developed intentions distinguishes Curry's approach to teaching conventionalized gestures. For Curry, following Stanislavski, authenticity, or genuiness, emerges from a commensurate relationship between intention and gesture. For the workshop, providing blind actors haptic contact with a sighted actor's gestural vocabulary provided the imitative means by which they were not only to learn conventionalized gesture, but also, paradoxically, to become genuine. Gesture becomes evidence of a disabled actor's theatrical ability as well as her authenticity, but this authenticity is articulated through nondisabled norms, norms already inscribed by history, culture, and gender. Curry tempers this conflation of authenticity with nondisabled norms by contending that disabled actors put a "personal stamp" on their gestures after acquiring facility with conventions (155). But this only further amplifies the paradox: disabled actors become legible as authentic by inflecting conventionalized nondisabled norms with (disabled) idiosyncrasies. Within the space of a single gesture, and within the space of *every* gesture, the workshop demands the disabled actor become authentic by simultaneously performing sameness (ability) and difference (disability).

There is insufficient space in this chapter to rehearse the myriad ways the workshop attempted to rehabilitate its disabled students' genuiness. Yet even this small sample of how the workshop considered disabled actors to pose an obstacle to authenticity while also providing an authenticating function through their disabled embodiment illuminates the scope of NTWH's rehabilitative projects. One of Curry's primary goals with the workshop was to create a training manual so that their methodologies could be textually relayed to future generations of disabled actors. Creating a manual communicating both the theoretical and practical foundations of his acting practice would constitute yet another way in which he would place himself within a genealogy of both Jesuit and Stanislavskian practice. Curry acknowledged his "debt to Jesuit theatre principles and Stanislavsky's methods" and suggested that his manual would prove "reminiscent of Lang's *Discourse on Stage Movement* and Toporkov's *Stanislavsky in Rehearsal*" (137-8). Curry and his colleagues kept immaculate records of their methods and practices in the acting classroom in order to compete for a HEW grant for adapting postsecondary-level curricula for people with disabilities (137). The documentation they produced in pursuit of this funding eventually became a handbook, which the workshop instituted in the curriculum of their introductory acting courses (156). Although they did not receive this funding, the grant application provided them with the structure to generate the manual they needed to expand and improve the workshop's efforts to rehabilitate authenticity in the decades to come.

CHAPTER THREE

Entrepreneurial Acts: Performing the Americans with Disabilities Act at Twenty-five

Shannon DeVido is adventure tourism's "next big thing."[1] For the price of a cookie, she guides clients on private tours of historic Philadelphia. The catch? DeVido's skill as a tour guide matches her entrepreneurial acumen. Participants encounter the Liberty Bell, Reading Terminal Market, and the Schuykill River while sitting astride a desk chair from Ikea and clinging to the back of DeVido's electric wheelchair. From this precarious perch, they listen to DeVido's unreliable historical banter, careen into oncoming traffic, and scramble to catch up with DeVido when she departs landmarks unannounced. Still, tourists champion this new service with unbridled enthusiasm. One testimony describes the experience as "Super fun!" before noting, "I only fell off once!"

Luckily for DeVido's would-be customers, Riding Shannon is not a real business, but the subject of a faux commercial that constitutes episode six, "Tour Edition", of *Stare at Shannon*, a web series that documents the exploits of the acerbic comedian who describes her physical appearance as that of "an American Girl doll…*after* the war."[2] The web series' episodes are neither narratively continuous nor thematically linked, bearing few common threads besides the persistent presence of DeVido and an array of baked goods. (The

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[1] Shannon DeVido, "*Stare at Shannon* Episode 6: Tour Edition," YouTube video, 3:26, 19 March 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GlFEEhvPdg

[2] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido*. 25/40 Celebration: Honoring the 25th Anniversary of the ADA and the 40th Anniversary of VSA. Millenium Stage South, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC, 16 July 2015.

episode preceding “Tour Edition,” for example, consists entirely of DeVido singing a parody of “On My Own” from *Les Miserables* about her inability, when seated in her wheelchair, to reach a cupcake on her kitchen counter.)[3] The three-and-a-half-minute “Tour Edition” splices together footage from a sample historical tour with irreverent faux-testimonies from the likes of Liam Neeson in order to advertise DeVido’s nonexistent enterprise.

DeVido’s “Tour Edition” offers a trenchant critique of the disproportionate emphasis on entrepreneurship within contemporary disability politics. The episode represents DeVido as a failed entrepreneur not only because she conceives and markets an unpleasant, inaccurate, inattentive (and sometimes dangerous) service, but also because she neglects to charge a fee that could result in an economically viable mode of self-employment. DeVido’s comical reduction of the exchange value of a Riding Shannon tour to “the price of a cookie” does not indict DeVido on account of her individual entrepreneurial failure, but the political failures of entrepreneurship’s individualizing ethos. This chapter addresses how celebratory discourses of disability entrepreneurship evince greater interest in providing the veneer of economically productive capacity rather than in economically sustaining disabled Americans.

The figure of the disabled entrepreneur also appeared within DeVido’s performance at The 25/40 Celebration in July 2015, a festival commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the 40th anniversary of VSA (formerly “Very Special Arts”), a disability arts organization administered by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. DeVido’s broader comedy routine considered the challenges of being a

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[3] Shannon DeVido, “*Stare at Shannon* Episode 5: Oscar Edition,” YouTube video, 4:48, 24 February, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSGCz9L1Kr8

disabled artist relative to the economic precarity of arts work. DeVido declares that she became "an entertainer because [she] hate[s] money," before elaborating the endless day jobs she has taken on to supplement her work as a comedian and actress.[4] She feigns optimism as she recalls scrolling through Craiglist ads in search of better employment opportunities, hopeful to glean that Steven Spielberg is casting "a brunette leading lady who uses a wheelchair."[5] She relays the comedy of errors that ensued when she auditioned for the U.S. Navy's chorus without disclosing to her recruiter that she used a wheelchair. But DeVido's performance defers discussions of disability entrepreneurship until the final sequence, the conclusion of her comedic investigation of the economic precarity experienced by disabled arts workers.

Having recited her employment woes, DeVido arrives at an epiphany. She doesn't need the commercial film industry to cast disabled actors. She doesn't need to trick the U.S. military into becoming an unwitting patron of disability arts. She needs to entrepreneurialize herself in the illicit narcotics trade. By identifying drug trade as the entrepreneurial path to which she is best suited, DeVido gestures to the long history of disabled people working in informal economies, "trading services and products below the radar of the state" as a result of the discrimination they experience in formal labor markets.[6] My description of illicit drug trade as an entrepreneurial activity draws upon Patricia Ybarra's contention that "narco-entrepreneurs" – as they manifest representationally in various modes of cultural production and drive the material circulation of transnational capital – offer one of the fullest

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[4] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

[5] Ibid.

[6] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 39.

realizations of what Michel Foucault calls "the entrepreneur of himself."[7] Foucault derives his theory of the entrepreneur of the self from Chicago-school economist Gary Becker's theories of human capital, leading Foucault to define neoliberal economic man as "being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings."[8]

DeVido begins staging a disabled iteration of the neoliberal entrepreneur of the self when she speculates about her future in the drug trade. She continues to do so through the closing lines of her act when describes herself as "20% woman, 80% metal, 100% awkward," a rationalization of her body that is not incidental to her entrepreneurial character.[9] She suggests that she might hoard narcotics in "every orifice of her wheelchair," less marking the chair as accomplice to her business exploits than establishing a porous sense of the self being entrepreneurialized.[10] But moreso than her mobility aid, it is ableist attitudes that readily capacitate DeVido's dreams of narco-entrepreneurialism. "No one suspects that I leave my house," DeVido remarks, "much less that I run an elaborate drug cartel."[11] Within DeVido's formulation, structural racism, as much as structural ableism, renders her availability to perform the labor of the narco-entrepreneur both possible and compulsory. At one point, DeVido stages an imagined encounter with a police officer to this effect. She adopts a

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[7] Patricia Ybarra, "Swallowing the 80's W(hole) Hole: Millenial Drama of the Narcoguerra." In *Latinx Theatre in Times of Neoliberalism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, forthcoming).

[8] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2010), 226.

[9] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

pathetic pose and meekly defends herself against the fictitious officer, surveying her own body before looking up to make eye contact with him: "I can't lift milk."[12] By exaggerating the extent of her physical incapacity, DeVido successfully performers her own innocence for the police officer. This staging of physical disability toward entrepreneurial ends exemplifies what disability theorist Tobin Siebers calls "disability masquerade," practices of exaggerating the causes and effects of disabled embodiment in order to secure access to goods and resources (including capital and a modicum of protection from the threat of police violence).[13] Bright eyed and smiling, DeVido plays her own meekness not only as a sign of her disablement, but of her whiteness, in effect demonstrating how structural racism shores up the structural ableism that allows the officer to interpret the degree of DeVido's disablement as an index of the degree of her innocence.

DeVido's speculation about her propensity for narco-trafficking was the first of many evocations of the disabled entrepreneur of the self at The 25/40 Celebration ("25/40."), for which she served as the opening act. This chapter argues that entrepreneurship emerged as 25/40's key paradigm for commemorating the Americans with Disabilities Act. This is not only to say that that festival featured or represented disabled entrepreneurs. Rather, attending to the festival's programming in aggregate reveals persistent, but often compromised, even failed, efforts to performatively enact disabled entrepreneurs into being. Through a diverse array of curatorial, interpretive, and pedagogical practices, 25/40 elaborated a remarkable investment in entrepreneurializing the performers who populated its stages, the historical disabled Americans of whom they spoke, and the spectators who attended the festivities. Throughout the chapter, I oscillate between

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Tobin Siebers, "Disability as Masquerade," *Literature and Medicine*, 23.1(2004): 1-22.

mobilizing "entrepreneur" in the more quotidian sense of a small business owner, and Foucault's theorization of the entrepreneur of the self as neoliberal economic man, a movement that also characterizes the multiple entrepreneurial threads within the festival itself. In so doing, I examine how the festival staged entrepreneurial capacities as offering the "grid of intelligibility" for what might otherwise seem non-economic activity, and as a grid of intelligibility for interpreting the history of disability rights – and the disabled subject as worthy of civil rights – in the United States.[14]

"Entrepreneurial Acts" accounts for how 25/40 represented and enacted disability entrepreneurship as the ADA's most laudable legacy, and demonstrates how artists, scholars, government workers, and spectators both bolstered and contested this entrepreneurial paradigm. I draw upon performance analysis of festival programming, participant-observation research I conducted as a festival spectator, and textual and visual analysis of 25/40's publicity materials. I engage a range of entrepreneurial enactments, both those that worked and those that failed (or, to use J.L. Austin's dyad, those that were both "happy" and "unhappy" performatives).[15] The examples of entrepreneurial enactment I include are representative rather than exhaustive, and many of the 25/40 events that most explicitly took on the subject of work do not figure prominently here. In so doing, I demonstrate how and why the disabled entrepreneur has achieved such explanatory and affective power within disability politics, and illuminate the limitations of entrepreneurial paradigms for disability performance history and disability historiography more broadly.

The pages that follow introduce the centrality of work within the ADA's enactment, as well as a review of the ADA's failure to achieve widespread legislative efficacy in the

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[14] Foucault, 243.

[15] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 15.

decades since the its passage. I then provide an overview of the 25/40 festival. The remainder of the chapter considers three different scenes of entrepreneurial enactment during the festival: a panel of academics and activists discussing institutionalization; the question and answer period following a film screening; and an interactive series of "stair portraiture" commemorating the Capitol Crawl, a renowned disability activist protest that precipitated the passage of the ADA. Collectively, these examples demonstrate the breadth of purposes for which 25/40 mobilized the disabled entrepreneur: as a historiographic discourse in which the humanity of pre-ADA disabled Americans becomes intelligible; as an alibi for the disabled performer as being always already a solo performer only able to play the self; and as a political vision for an accessible future achieved through privatization.

The ADA Goes to Work

On July 26, 1990, a crowd of more than three thousand spectators gathered on the White House lawn to witness President George H.W. Bush sign the Americans with Disabilities Act into law.[16] The U.S. would now have a civil rights bill protecting disabled people from employment discrimination and giving them access to public transportation, telecommunications, and public accommodations such as restaurants. The ADA arrived after years of attempts to push legislation through both houses of Congress and after nearly two decades of activists trying to retain at least some provisions of its predecessor, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which had been gutted under the Reagan administration. Bush's remarks during the signing ceremony emphasized that the bill was most significant

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[16] Lennard J. Davis, *Enabling Acts: The Hidden Story of How the Americans with Disabilities Act Gave The Largest US Minority its Rights* (Boston: Beacon, 2015), 217-224, at 17. Unless otherwise noted, I draw upon Davis in my historiography of the ADA below.

for conferring onto disabled Americans the status of "workers," something that would prove a boon to both American business and government coffers:

> You've called for new sources of workers. Well, many of our fellow citizens with disabilities are unemployed. They want to work, and they can work, and this is a tremendous pool of people. And remember, this a tremendous pool of people who will bring to jobs diversity, loyalty, proven low turnover rate, and only one request: the chance to prove themselves. And when you add together Federal, State, local, and private funds, it costs almost $200 billion annually to support Americans with disabilities – in effect, to keep them dependent. Well, when given the opportunity to be independent, they will move proudly into the economic mainstream of American life, and that's what this legislation is all about.[17]

Bush did not merely figure disability as compatible with work, but as a resource in the form of the disabled worker's diversity and loyalty. At the end of his remarks, Bush announced, "I now lift my pen to sign the Americans with Disabilities Act and say: Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down," a rhetorical likening of the legislation's dismantling of physical and social barriers to fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War.[18] Granting workplace "opportunity" to disabled workers represented disability as not only analogous with, but central to, the triumph of global capitalism and the U.S.'s ascendence within this political economic order. This was not the only instance in which Bush likened the enactment of the ADA to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Earlier in his remarks, he declared:

> Even the strongest person couldn't scale the Berlin Wall to gain the elusive promise of independence that lay just beyond. And so, together we rejoiced when that barrier fell. And now I sign legislation which takes a sledgehammer to another wall, one which has for too many generations separated Americans with disabilities from the freedom they could glimpse, but not grasp.[19]

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[17] George H.W. Bush, "Remarks of President George Bush at the Signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act," Washington, D.C., 26 July 1990. http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/videos/ada_signing_text.html

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

Earlier in his speech, Bush also identified the Soviet Union as among the members of the EEC that "hope to enact now similar legislation" to the ADA.[20]

The signing ceremony on the White House lawn was, as Lennard Davis recounts, bittersweet at best for many of the disability activists who had worked on the bill.[21] They were thrilled that the legislation had been passed, but, having worked ardently to guarantee the signing ceremony would not be relegated to a minor event in the White House's East Room, they were disappointed by how the ceremony was ultimately staged. Key disability activists and policymakers (Senator Lowell Weicker, Ralph Neas, and Chai Feldblum) were expressly not invited to the ceremony, and despite the fact that the ADA is often heralded as a model of bipartisan collaboration, only Republicans sat alongside Bush during this performance of legislative enactment. Disability activists and Senators Ted Kennedy and Tom Harkin (both Democrats) were relegated to the audience.[22] Even Justin Dart, a disabled Republican advisor to Bush who had been instrumental in passing the bill (and who appeared alongside Bush during the signing ceremony), admitted, "I thought I was going to feel euphoric but…I felt oppressed and depressed," citing his anxiety about the possibility that they may have passed the bill "too soon."[23]

If these sentiments tempered expectations of unadulterated political joy, it bears noting that President Bush's performative speech act – "I now lift my pen to sign the Americans with Disabilities Act and say: Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down" – also proved to be an unhappy one. To say that this speech act, occurring

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Davis, 217-224.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 221.

at the intersection of verbal performance and textual inscription, was "unhappy" – to borrow from J.L Austin – is to say that it did not work— that is, it was not spoken within the appropriate felicity conditions that would invest this utterance with performative force, with efficacy.[24] There might be many reasons to call the felicity conditions of Bush's speech into question. Senator Ted Kennedy and "General" Pat Wright, founder of the Disability Rights Education and Legal Defense Fund (DREDF) and one of the ADA's primary architects, suspected the infelicity of the President's speech on the basis that he had not read the legislation. On many occasions, including a panel at 25/40 and footage captured in the disability rights documentary *Lives Worth Living*, Wright has recalled that she and Kennedy were both convinced that Bush never would have signed something as expansive as the ADA if he had actually read it and had any sense of the potential effects of its provisions.[25] For Kennedy and Wright, this infelicity actually boded well, a mere side effect of what allowed the signing of the ADA to happen in the first place. But the infelicity that points to the incommensurability between Bush's signature, speech, and the *actual*, material "walls of exclusion" coming down has to do with the fact that the ADA has no enforcement mechanism outside of lawsuits filed by private citizens or by the Department of Justice on behalf of those citizens.

Legal scholars and disability activists alike have highlighted the absence of an extra-juridical enforcement mechanism as a significant obstruction to the ADA's efficacy as a civil rights law, a barrier that became all the more profound in light of the increasingly narrow

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[24] Austin, 15.

[25] "Signing of the ADA: The Ceremony on the White House Lawn." 25/40 Celebration: Honoring the 25th Anniversary of the ADA and the 40th Anniversary of VSA. Outside, South Side, Madison Drive, National Museum of American History, Washington D.C., 26 July 2015; *Lives Worth Living,* Directed By Eric Neudel (2011; Natick MA: Storyline Motion Pictures/Independent Television Service, 2011), DVD.

juridical interpretations of the law between 1990 and the 2008 passage of the ADA Amendments Act. Mary Johnson, founder and editor of *The Disability Rag* and *Ragged Edge*, argues that such narrow interpretations of the ADA derived from the fact that judges repeatedly interpreted the ADA as if it were benefits legislation rather than civil rights legislation:[26]

> In a series of decisions the spring this book was being finalized, the Supreme Court, interpreting the ADA as a kind of law it never was, succeeded in imposing the benefits reading on it firmly enough so that much of its broad-ranging vision is now hamstrung. A crabbed medical proof of "true" disability will now be required of any employee who seeks redress against a company that has discriminated against them on the basis of disability. Whether or not any disability discrimination has actually occurred seem seven less of interests to the court than it ever was.[27]

Allow me to elaborate Johnson's understanding of a "benefits reading" of disability law. Prior to the passage of the ADA, disability within the U.S. juridical imagination primarily concerned the government's distribution of cash benefits on the basis of disability status, such as the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).[28] Such legal cases largely concerned the judiciary discerning whether the litigant in question met the legal definition of disability outlined by the agency providing benefits, such as the Social Security Administration. Such definitions focused primarily on one's capacity to perform "substantial gainful activity."[29] As Johnson and legal scholars like Ruth Colker have argued, judges who encountered law suits citing the Americans with Disabilities Act treated

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[26] Mary Johnson, *Make Them Go Away: Clint Eastwood, Christopher Reeve, and The Case Against Disability Rights* (Louisville: The Avocado Press, 2003).

[27] Ibid., xv.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Social Security Administration, "Disability Evaluation Under Social Security," Accessed 14 June, 2016. https://www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook/general-info.htm

these cases, too, as if the issue were the veracity of a litigant's claim to disability status, not whether or not discrimination based on disability had occurred.[30]

The narrowness of such juridical interpretations stand in sharp contradistinction to the ADA's capacious sense of the range of Americans who would benefit from its protections. Following the precedent of Section 504 (the civil rights provision of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which only applied to federal contractors), the ADA defined the subject of disability rights through a tripartrate approach: those "1) having a substantial impairment that limited one or more life activities; 2) having a history of such; or 3) being regarded as such."[31] The first prong would protect, for example, a blind woman capable of performing the required functions of a job but who is not hired on the basis of her blindness. The second prong would protect a cancer survivor in remission, someone not currently disabled but who has a record of "substantial impairment" and who experiences discrimination accordingly.

The benefits readings of the ADA that persisted for nearly two decades interpreted these prongs narrowly, but a consideration of the third prong of this legislation, those "regarded" *as* having substantial impairment, illuminates the profound narrowness of efforts to prioritize the litigant's actual disability status. This final prong effectively makes the ADA applicable to anyone protected by and subject to federal law. A number of (mis)perceived "substantial impairments" animated policymakers and disability activists in writing this prong of the bill. Discussions of perceived disability often reference people with significant facial scarring, a bodily difference that does not constitute a barrier to participating in a "major life

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[30] Ruth Colker, *The Disability Pendulum: The First Decade of the Americans with Disabilities Act* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

[31] Davis, 228.

activity," but that an employer might use as a basis for not hiring someone on the basis that it might alienate customers. By protecting people "regarded" as having disabilities (emphasizing the role of spectatorship in reading and producing disabled subjects) alongside people "with" disabilities, the ADA articulated what disability theorists call a "social model" of disability that understood disability to be produced by the dynamic interplay of material bodies, social environments, and cultural attitudes, even as it suggested medical (and medicalizing) criteria for what constituted a substantial impairment.[32]

Court rulings throughout the 1990s and early 2000s thwarted the potential efficacy of the ADA, which was already compromised because juridical recourse was its sole enforcement mechanism.[33] A report proposing amendments to the ADA observed that judges were rarely predisposed to interpreting the ADA in the spirit with which it was intended, that "the judiciary all too often has given the Act [the original ADA] the cold shoulder."[34] The proposed amendments, writes disability theorist Lennard Davis, "sought to rid the ADA of the problematic phrase that disability was an impairment that 'substantially limits one or more life activity' and to simply say flat out that disability was a "physical or mental impairment….there would be no room for legal parsing. A disability was a disability, period."[35] In 2008, Congress passed the ADA Amendment Act, with seemingly more objective definitions of disability, in large part to redirect judges from focusing on whether a

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[32] Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability." In *The Disability Studies Reader*. Ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 214-221.

[33] Davis, 225-250.

[34] National Council on Disability, *Righting the ADA* (Washington, D.C.: National Council on Disability, 2004), 39, www.ncd.gov, quoted in Davis, 237.

[35] Davis, 238.

litigant *was* disabled to deciding whether or not discrimination had occurred on the basis of disability.

Many critics agree that the ADA has been more widely and effectively enforced since the 2008 amendments went into effect, but the ADA's failure to achieve efficacy as civil rights legislation protecting everyone inadvertently reverberated throughout the 25/40 celebration. Again and again, curators, government workers, and publicity materials emphasized the ADA's extraordinariness in terms of the number of people that benefit from it: 54 million Americans. Given the history of promoting and defending the cause of disability rights on the basis of the number of people who are disabled, this celebratory rhetoric is a familiar strategy. And yet, within the context of 25/40, this constant refrain offered an unwitting index of the ADA's failure, a failure that pertains not only the judiciary's historical narrowing of the ADA's enforcement, but to the entrepreneurial legacy the festival advocated. Shannon DeVido all but suggested as much herself when she opened her own entrepreneurial act by declaring that "the Americans with Disabilities Act is turning twenty-five, which probably explains why it's had a lot of failed relationships, moved back in with its parents, and people refuse to take it seriously."[36]

25/40: An Overview

The 25/40 Celebration unfolded in Washington, D.C. from July 16-26, 2015 at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History (NMAH). The two numbers conjoined within the celebration's title index the ages of the legislative and cultural institutions the festival sought to commemorate. 2015 marked both the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities

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[36] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

Act, the most expansive piece of disability rights legislation in U.S. history, and the 40th anniversary of VSA (formerly "Very Special Arts," formerly "National Committee, Arts for the Handicapped"), an international disability arts education initiative founded by Jean Kennedy Smith (sister to John, Ted, and Eunice) and presently administered by the Kennedy Center. The festival was unique in terms of its commemorative function, but as noted by Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility at the Kennedy Center, 25/40 was also ordinary in that it was merely the next iteration of international VSA festivals produced by the Kennedy Center "about every five years."[37] The "last big international festival had been in 2010," Siegel remembered, and the prospect of staging another festival coinciding with the ADA's twenty-fifth anniversary providing both an opportunity and an imperative to "really respect the history of work that has been done by so many individuals, artists, arts administrators, people who have been really supportive of people with disabilities."[38]

The celebration was staged within the same urban political landscape that it sought to anchor within genealogies of disability politics and activism, lending it an air of officialdom further bolstered by its duration (eleven days), spatial distribution across two major cultural institutions, and robust programming. But other aspects of the celebration pointed to Washington D.C., as only one nodal point (albeit an important one) within contemporary cartographies of disability activism. On the final day of the festival, Tom Olin, a renowned photographer of the disability rights movement, arrived at NMAH aboard the "ADA Legacy Tour Bus," concluding a cross-country tour that had stopped everywhere

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[37] Siegel, Betty. Interviewed by Patrick McKelvey. Phone Interview. 21 March 2016.

[38] Ibid.

from Duluth to Philadelphia in order to promote continued support for the ADA.[39] The bus's arrival at NMAH carried with it the historical and geographic traces of its multiple cross-country journeys (2015 and 2007), highlighting the ADA as a piece of living legislation vulnerable to dismantling and open to revision. That it was Olin at the wheel both secured the importance of photography as a resource for disability activism, and remembered the importance of access to public transportation, especially buses, within the disability rights movement.[40]

Performance appeared at 25/40 in many guises, but perhaps most explicitly in the Kennedy Center's cultural programming over the course of the celebration. Most of these performances took place as part of Millennium Stage, a series of year-round free programming on one of two stages erected at either end of the Grand Foyer, which is also the lobby area for the center's three largest theatres. Each of the Millennium Stages (North and South) features a flexible seating area with approximately 250 folding chairs partitioned off from the rest of the Foyer by red velvet ropes. Each day at 6:00 p.m., Millennium Stage featured free performances by one or more disabled artists working across multiple genres

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[39] Olin previous toured the bus around the United States in 2007 to garner support for the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, which sought to clarify the scope of the ADA, the enforcement of which had been compromised by narrow juridical interpretations.

[40] The thematically linked national network of festivals celebrating the ADA and/or VSA contributed to the temporal and geographic porousness of 25/40, but so did a number of other factors. Most events took place over eleven consecutive days at the Kennedy Center and NMAH, separated by a mile and a half journey down Virginia Avenue. Five of the six 25/40 exhibits at the Kennedy Center remained on view until 2 August 2015, and the sixth, the VSA Collection, is permanent. In effect, it was possible to encounter 25/40 in some form at least one week after the celebration had officially concluded. The Google Impact Challenge did not have a formal relationship to the festival outside of the two portraits that appeared on the steps outside of NMAH. However, additional stair portraits distributed throughout D.C. – from the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center just blocks from NMAH to Gallaudet University five miles to the northwest – further challenged the spatial boundaries of the festival.

and media, including stand-up comedy, storytelling, jazz, cabaret, and bluegrass. (Dramatic theatre was notably absent from the repertoire). The artists who appeared on Millenium Stage included both artists who consider themselves to be participants within disability arts, that is, artists like DeVido who think critically about disability as a political identity and thematize it in their work, and artists like Brother Ali, a blind hip-hop artist with albinism who, in Siegel's words, "just are," that is, who happen to be disabled but whose work is not explicitly rooted in disability consciousness.[41] Siegel understands this division primarily in generational terms, with what she and others have called "the ADA generation" (those who have grown up benefiting from the real and symbolic benefits of this legislation) unburdened with the need to tackle the subject of disability head-on.[42] The performances that actually unfolded within 25/40 showed both this generational divide and political divide to be significantly more porous than festival curators may have been anticipated. For example, 25/40's performers who "just are" took the festival to task for presenting disabled artists almost exclusively within the frame of a free performance series in a marginal venue within the Kennedy Center's spatial economy: a temporary theatre erected in what is essentially a hallway for more luxurious theatres featuring commercial fare. "Disability is important," declared comedian Josh Blue, ventriloquizing the sentiments of the Kennedy Center's leaders, before looking longingly at the Concert Hall's lavish mezzanine seating visible from Millennium Stage: "Just not *that* important."[43]

25/40 also integrated performance programming in contexts outside of Millennium Stage. Multimedia Deaf performers Sean Forbes and DJ Robbie Wilde hosted a dance party

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[41] Siegel, Betty. Interviewed by Patrick McKelvey. Phone Interview. 21 March 2016.

[42] Ibid.

[43] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

in the Kennedy Center atrium following a screening of digital shorts from the TiLT Challenge, which "invited students, with and without disabilities, to explore disability experience by telling their own stories, imagining stories from unique perspectives, and magnifying disability stories of justice or injustice using digital media to express their creativity, skill, and talent."[44] The celebration's culminating event, "Jean Kennedy Smith Series: Disability + Culture," took place in the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall, the only 25/40 event permitted to migrate into one of the Kennedy Center's larger performance venues. This evening consisted of speeches commemorating VSA and the ADA, performances by young artists who have received support from VSA, an interview with four disabled artists conducted by broadcast journalist Judy Woodruff, and an abridged concert by blind jazz singer and pianist Diane Schurr.[45]

Several exhibits scattered throughout the Kennedy Center's hallways and corridors also mobilized performance in the form of political artifacts and aesthetic objects. "ADA 25th Anniversary: Championing Disability Rights" incorporated a looped recording of Senator Ted Kennedy's congressional testimony regarding the ADA. "Photographing the Revolution" featured Tom Olin's documentation of many performance-based protest actions within the disability rights movement, including the Capitol Crawl. Performance also appeared in the "Focus Forward" exhibit featuring work by VSA artists. Examples include Emily Francisco's *The Trans-Harmonium: A Listening Station* (2012), a network of clock radios

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[44] "TiLT Challenge Screening and Dance Party," *25/40 Celebration Event Guide.*

[45] This was the only event that required a ticket and was not open to the public. The apperances of temporary Will Call booths in the Grand Foyer specifically for this event – booths staffed by the Kennedy Center's Development Office – suggest that this event was oriented toward donors as much, if not more, than it was oriented toward members of the disability community.

connected to a piano that invites performances from human collaborators, and video art by aerialist Sarah Muehlbauer.

Festival ADA, the National Museum of American History's wing of 25/40, also featured a broad range of performances. Panels featuring activists, scholars, journalists, and policymakers both commemorated the ADA signing ceremony on the White House lawn and examined the violent legacies of eugenics and the institutionalization of disabled people. NMAH's programming opened with Matt Frazer's *Cabinet of Curiosities*, a solo performance that challenges the dominant curatorial logics organizing the representation of disabled people in museums and advocates for new practices. A day-long film festival featured *Deliverance* (1919), a film about Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan; *Lives Worth Living* (2011), a documentary about the disability rights movement in the United States; *Becoming Bulletproof*, a documentary about a film company making a Spaghetti Western with an integrated (disabled and nondisabled) cast; and select winners from the TilT Challenge. Performance theorists in attendance may have been most interested in how 25/40 staged performance as a historical and cultural process, providing an apt example of what Joseph Roach has termed "surrogation," the continuous process of filling "actual or perceived vacancies in the network of relations that constitute the social fabric," a "process of trying out various candidates….in different situations – the doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins."[46] In the absence of former President George H.W. Bush, who was

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[46] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2-3.

unable to attend the festivities, his grandson Pierce Bush appeared on his grandfather's behalf at multiple 25/40 events.[47]

The constancy of disability-oriented programming caused some confusion for people who visited the Kennedy Center or NMAH during 25/40, and indeed, seems to have confused some Kennedy Center employees themselves. This confusion seems especially unwarranted given that the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage series frequently features thematic programming across multiple performances, suggesting that it was disability itself – rather the continuous programming – that bemused spectators and workers alike.[48] Consider 25/40's opening night festivities. As I stood in line behind velvet ropes, awaiting entry to see comedians Shannon DeVido and Josh Blue perform on Millennium Stage South, the woman behind me attempted to verify that she was in the right line to see "the comedy show." The usher to whom she pitched her inquiry seemed baffled and apologized to the

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[47] Pierce Bush's appearances at 25/40 had a predictable dramaturgy: he read a letter from President Bush, lauded his grandfather as his personal hero, championed the termination of the Cold War and the signing of the ADA as the crowning achievements of the Bush presidency; and highlighted that the former President has now acquired a disability and uses a wheelchair, making him a beneficiary of the law he signed into being. Pierce Bush delivered nearly identical remarks during "Signing of the ADA: The Ceremony on the White House Lawn," the "Disability + Culture" event at the Kennedy Center on the final evening of 25/40, and, a colleague informed me, at a dinner for the National Council of Independent Living, which held a conference in Washington, D.C., the week following the festival. This was not the only example of surrogation operative at 25/40. Jean Kennedy Smith's teenage niece, Grace Kennedy, gave a speech honoring her aunt at the "Disability + Culture" event. These two examples of political surrogation suggest investments in not only securing the continued political import of both the Bush and Kennedy families, but an effort to further historicize the ADA as an exemplary achievement of bipartisan collaboration. Notably, these efforts were repeatedly undercut. On the panel commemorating the ADA signing ceremony, leading disability activist 'General" Pat Wright offered a faux-reverent apology to Pierce when she recalled that during the ceremony, she and Senator Ted Kennedy had discussed that it would only be possible for the President to sign something as expansive as the ADA if he had neglected to read it.

[48] In July 2015 alone, Millenium Stage hosted performances for the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival, the DC Hip-Hop Theatre Festival, and the National Symphony Orchestra Summer Music Institute. The Kennedy Center Millenium Stage Brochure, July 2015.

patron, noting that there must have been a change in programming. Tonight's event would feature not comedians, he informed her, but "the handicapped." The usher eventually skimmed the contents of the programs he had been distributing, and a confused expression spread over his face as he realized that the performers this evening were both comedians *and* "handicapped." "Well!," he exclaimed, "how about that?" This particular usher's ignorance was not necessarily representative of patrons or employees at the Kennedy Center. Betty Siegel noted to me in an interview that while the staff was reminded of the upcoming festival, no extra training was provided:

> Because we've already spent so many years, fifteen years or so, training our staff in a way that this is integrated into their general training, that people with disabilities *are* coming here to the Kennedy Center, and we're going to welcome people, and we're going to make this be a space where if we do it right, accessibility is just invisible, it just is there.[49]

Of course, having training in accessibility is one thing and developing a political consciousness about disability arts is another. That even staff members regularly trained with accessibility in mind were less than optimally equipped points perhaps not only to the limits of "access" as a rubric for creating disability affirming social spaces and arts programming, it indexes the breadth of knowledge and experience that people brought to 25/40.

Spectators arrived at 25/40 with a range of political commitments, aesthetic expectations, and background knowledges.[50] Most performances enjoyed audiences with a

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[49] Siegel, Betty. Interviewed by Patrick McKelvey. Phone Interview 21 March 2016.

[50] Many of the performance events within 25/40's fold did not adhere to a strict bicameral legislation between performer and audience. The dance party featuring DJ Robbie Wilde and Sean Forbes and the Google Impact staircase, for example, were immersive and participatory in conceit. A number of performances put "audience members" on display through formal or informal question and answer periods incorporated within the frame of the performance event. Josh Blue repeatedly incorporated his unwitting ASL interpreter into his act (pausing his act to face him and watch him sign; calling him out for "saying everything that I'm saying"), an act that uniquely situated Blue as persistently engaging in acts of spectatorship

fair number of spectators with apparent disabilities, but this number varied significantly from night to night. Some audience members came to 25/40 to see particular performers who have received national media exposure through their participation in primetime reality television programs like *Last Comic Standing* (Josh Blue) and *The Voice* (Blessing Offor). Others identified themselves as government workers, attending the festival with their colleagues at state agencies sponsoring festival programming. For example, the Department of State provided partial funding for the opening night performance, and invited not only several state department workers, but also fifty foreign exchange guests studying human rights.[51] Unsuspecting tourists also became 25/40 audiences when, after finishing their late afternoon tours of the Kennedy Center, they decided to wait in line and take advantage of the cultural programming. Still others were paying audiences who arrived well in advance of the 7:30pm curtain for national tours of the Broadway musicals *Once* and *The Book of Mormon* playing at the Kennedy Center. That the 25/40 performance programming (as with Millenium Stage programming outside of the 25/40 context) doubled as free pre-show entertainment for paying audiences for popular theatrical fair is complicated.[52] Certainly, it provided 25/40 with larger audiences and introduced the Broadway musical audiences to disabled artists they might not otherwise be exposed to. But it also further conferred

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within his own show. This brought into high relief the labor of the ASL interpreter, who is both a professional performer (visually embodying someone else's language for Deaf audiences) and professional spectator (visually and sonically apprehending the material that she needs to interpret).

[51] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

[52] On multiple occasions, I counted in excess of 200 spectators standing in the Grand Foyer to catch at least part of the 25/40 programming before moving on to attend their regularly scheduled musicals. Some 25/40 events only reached half capacity (between 100-150 seats). But more often than not, the audience was so full that people had to be directed to informal overflow seating on the red carpeted stairs leading from the foyer to the Concert Hall.

disabled artists a secondary status within the Kennedy Center's performance economy, suggested not only by its location, but its accidental, unpaying audience.

What 25/40 Sought to Accomplish

Entrepreneurship was the reigning paradigm for understanding disability politics and history at 25/40, but it was not the festival's only concern. Siegel remembers the subject of employment more broadly, along with housing and education, as being focal points within planning meetings, but also understood the Smithsonian portion of 25/40 to be tackling those issues more explicitly. "The Kennedy Center didn't go out of its way to put focus on employment," she informed me, "except for the fact that we employed a bunch of artists during 25/40 who were artists with disabilities. Of course that's where we like to go, to put money where our mouth is, and provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities."[53] She was also quick to point out that this commitment to employing people with disabilities did not occur within a vacuum, but grew from commitments, including an internship program for arts administrators with disabilities, that the Kennedy Center implemented in the late 1990s.[54] My spectatorship throughout the festival further illuminated that two of 25/40's primary goals were to commemorate the Americans with Disabilities Act as a landmark piece of civil rights legislation for disabled Americans, and in so doing, to position the United States as a global leader in disability rights.

It is hardly surprising that 25/40 featured incessant refrains marking the ADA as a legislative triumph. More surprising is the evidence 25/40 mobilized to index this success: that the ADA affords legal protection against discrimination to some 54 million disabled

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[53] Siegel, Betty. Interviewed by Patrick McKelvey. Phone Interview. 21 March 2016.

[54] Ibid.

Americans. This strategy – championing the ADA in terms of the scope of the minoritarian population it stands to protect – inadvertently indexes the ADA's patchy history of enforcement. This tactic serves as a reminder that only those adjudicated to be disabled are served by the Americans with Disabilities Act, a reminder that it fails to reach the status of civil rights law by affording protections to everyone.[55]

25/40's efforts to represent the ADA as a legislative achievement was not an end unto itself but part of a broader strategy to position the United States as a global leader in disability rights. Championing the ADA as successful legislation became a key component in promoting a disability-focused variant of American exceptionalism. Through these efforts, 25/40 staged disability rights as the proper barometer of a nation-state's democratic capacities, what Robert McRuer calls "disability nationalism" and what Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell call "ablenationalism."[56] In light of 25/40's resolute ablenationalism, "54 million disabled Americans" seems to achieve its political purchase in part by purporting to index a large swath of the U.S. population without going so far as to suggest that the U.S. is a disabled state.

Ablenationalism saturated 25/40 from beginning to end, emphasizing the importance of exporting disability rights policies modeled upon the ADA as a vehicle for exporting democratic ideals more broadly. At the opening night performance, Judith Heumann, a disability rights pioneer now employed by the State Department, referred to the

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[55] U.S. Census Bureau, "U.S. and World Population Clock." Accessed 24 November 2015. http://www.census.gov/popclock/

[56] Robert McRuer, "Disability Nationalism in Crip Times." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 4.2 (2010): 163-178; David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, "Introduction: Ablenationalism and the Geopolitics of Disability." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 4.2 (2010): 113-125.

ADA as "strong legislation" and announced that the State Department currently had under its auspices more than fifty foreign exchange guests studying human rights, many of whom were in the audience that evening.[57] Not only were disability rights invoked as synecdoche for human rights, but 25/40 explicitly identified itself as part of an ablenationalist project. The arts–and especially performance–presented in 25/40 were not merely ornamental in these efforts. They functioned, as Joshua Chambers-Letson has argued of performance in a different context, as "agents of the law" by fulfilling a "legal function" and "mudd[ying] and collaps[ing]" the distinction between "quotidian performance and aesthetic performance."[58] Heumann reminded us in her introductory speech that Mexico, New Zealand, Jordan, and Ukraine, were among the countries around the world hosting screening parties of 25/40's opening night performances on live simulcast, watching not only her opening remarks, but the comedic talents of Shannon DeVido and Josh Blue.[59]

This ablenationalist drive persisted throughout the celebration. Consider the question and answer period that followed the screening of *Lives Worth Living* as part of the disability film festival at NMAH. Audience members announced how useful they have found this disability rights documentary as a teaching tool, with one person even announcing that an abridged version of the film has been incorporated within the Core Curriculum for U.S. history in Massachusetts. In response, Eric Neudel, the film's director, announced that the State Department has screened *Lives Worth Living* in a number of "developing countries" in order to teach their governments about disability rights. These countries included Pakistan,

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[57] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

[58] Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, "Introduction: Performance, Law, and the Race So Different." In *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 5-7.

[59] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

Vietnam, Laos, and Russia, a veritable archive of U.S. imperialism and the long Cold War. As the festival continued, it became increasingly clear that ablenationalism would achieve its political force not only through the circulation and exportation of policy, but through a relationship of mimicry in which the ADA, and by extension, the United States, enjoyed status as the original. On the final evening of 25/40, Dr. I. King Jordan (the first Deaf President of Gallaudet University, 1988-2006), declared that this project had already taken effect, and that disability rights were spreading globally as "other countries copy the ADA."[60]

U.S. disability nationalism also accrued its efficacy through means other than foregrounding the importance of exporting U.S. legislation and cultural production to countries perceived to be backward or outmoded with regards to disability policy. Consider the biographical placard for visual artist Xang Mimi Ho in the Kennedy Center's "Focus Forward" exhibit, which featured recent works by disabled artists who have received support from VSA. The biographic note emphasizes that Ho moved from her native Bangkok to Ohio in "hopes of a promising future and better healthcare," framing the United States as a haven of health and futurity for disabled people who lack recourse to ADA-like legislation in their home countries.

Artists who performed at 25/40 were as resilient in their ventriloquism of ablenationalist rhetoric as the government workers and architects of U.S. disability policy who participated in the festival. Even Shannon DeVido, who opened her act by taking several shots at the ADA's inefficacy, eventually mobilized ablenationalist themes by marking geopolitical territories external to the United States as constituted by exceptionally obtrusive physical barriers and virulent ableism. Midway through her act, DeVido, who uses

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[60] "Disability + Culture: The Jean Kennedy Smith Series." 25/40 Celebration: Honoring the 25th Anniversary of the ADA and the 40th Anniversary of VSA. Concert Hall, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington D.C., 26 July 2015.

a wheelchair, makes a series of unimaginative Orientalist jokes about China, identifying it as a site of contagion, ostensibly the reason she has no desire to travel there. Later, she names the Great Wall of China as the actual reason that China rounds out the bottom of her list of priority destinations. She cracks, almost too easily: "The Great Wall of China? More like the mediocre wall of stairs."[61]

A generous reading might suggest that DeVido's crack is only inadvertently ablenationalist, or that ablenationalism is only one of the joke's many effects. Most obviously, DeVido encourages audiences to rethink the splendor of architectural achievements from a disability perspective, to consider the Great Wall of China as an extreme example of more quotidian forms of accessibility issues that wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments experience in a wide range of cultural and historical contexts. DeVido's derision for the Great Wall of China questions which bodies are able to experience the wall as an achievement. The joke also depends on a non-Western site – and specifically, *the* non-Western site that is imagined as the nadir of labor relations and that the United States fears will replace it as the leader of global capitalism – as the embodiment of physical inaccessibility. *At least the ADAPT protestors who staged the Capitol Crawl only had to make their way up some eighty steps*, the joke seems to say. Despite all of the ways in which 25/40 commemorated U.S. disability history by according stairs a prominent role within the festival's visual and architectural economy – such as the Google Impact portraits – DeVido's joke suggested a desire to disarticulate the problem of physical access from both U.S. political life and 25/40 itself, and deposit it in the East.

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[61] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

Entrepreneurial Historiography: Reading the Disabled Entrepreneur Before the ADA

One of 25/40's most explicit references to the disabled entrepreneur concerned a seemingly unlikely subject: Junius Wilson, a deaf African American man wrongly accused of a crime in 1925 and then forcibly institutionalized at the North Carolina State Hospital for the Colored Insane for nearly eighty years, until his death in 2001. Wilson figured twice within 25/40 programming. First, information about Wilson and some of his personal ephemera appeared within NMAH's wall exhibit on disability history. Additionally, historian Susan Burch discussed Wilson on a panel titled, "Section 504, Eugenics, and Deinstitutionalization," held outdoors at NMAH on July 26, the ADA's anniversary and final day of 25/40.[62]

Beginning a discussion of 25/40's entrepreneurial acts with Wilson may seem an odd choice, given that Wilson figured only peripherally within 25/40 until Burch made her remarks on the final day of the festival. Yet I choose to begin with Wilson for two primary reasons. Entrepreneurial sentiments and intimations accrued throughout the course of the festival, but were most aggressively expressed with reference to Wilson. Discussing Wilson brings into high relief the entrepreneurial implications of the rest of 25/40 programming. Second, because Wilson lived so much of his life – and conducted so much of his "entrepreneurial" activity – in the decades preceding the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, he is a helpful figure with whom to think, from a historical perspective, the stakes of yoking disability to entrepreneurship. I read two representations of Wilson (Burch's

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[62] "Section 504, Eugenics, and Deinstitutionalization." 25/40 Celebration: Honoring the 25th Anniversary of the ADA and the 40th Anniversary of VSA. Outside, South Side, Madison Drive, National Museum of American History, Washington D.C., 26 July 2015. This panel was moderated by journalist Joe Shapiro, and featured other leading disability historians and activists including Marilyn Golden, Brian Greenwald, Judith Heumann, and Kim Nielsen. Each panelist spoke for approximately ten minutes.

speech and the wall display) within 25/40 alongside a biography of Wilson (co-authored by Burch), to consider how 25/40 mobilized entrepreneurship as a historiographic lens meant to make visible the humanity of disabled Americans via their entrepreneurial capacities. In so doing, 25/40 shored up narratives about the ADA and the history of racialized capitalism in an effort to bolster a history of disability entrepreneurship that gets retroactively read back on to the ADA in light of failures to enforce its employment provisions. Ultimately, this account illuminates the insidious violence that accompanies projects committed to portraying disabled people as entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship as an optic of disability history.

Burch's remarks provided an abbreviated overview of Junius Wilson's life compressed into the brief ten-minute slot each panelist was afforded. In her narration, Wilson's incarceration in the North Carolina State Hospital for the Colored Insane was the product of communications barriers, structural ableism, and the profound racism permeating the Jim Crow South. Wilson had studied for several years at a deaf black school in Raleigh, where he learned a regional sign language that was not mutually intelligible with (white) American Sign Language. He was also illiterate in written English. Thus, Wilson found himself unable to communicate effectively with the white hearing legal and medical apparatus he encountered following his arrest, unable to contest the state's labeling him insane and unable to establish his own competency to pursue trial.

Burch spoke almost exclusively of Wilson, but her account of the devastating effects of ableism and racism refused to understand Wilson as an exception, resonating provocatively with contemporaneous activism against U.S. police brutality targeting African American men, a large number of them disabled. Yet Burch's narration of Wilson's life only dwelled intermittently in registers of violence and abjection: the vast majority of her remarks were dedicated to Wilson's resilience amidst the physical, psychic, and social violence he experienced during his decades of institutionalization. It might come as little surprise, then, that Burch foregrounded one aspect of Wilson's endurance above and beyond all else: his "entrepreneurial spirit."

Burch evidenced Wilson's "entrepreneurial spirit" by discussing the number of small business ventures he operated during his institutionalization. For example, Wilson collected worms as he walked the hospital grounds and would sell them as bait to fishermen. Sometimes he saved the profits from these sales, but he often reinvested his money at the general store, purchasing candy that he would later resell at inflated prices. These earnings enabled Wilson to purchase three bicycles (they were repeatedly stolen) in which he took great pride and rode around the institution's grounds. Burch's remarks stressed that even within an environment of profound constraint, Wilson exerted some degree of agency through quotidian activities: buying candy, feeling the breeze across his skin while biking across the hospital's campus. But even if we accept the premise that these activities afforded Wilson some meaningful semblance of agency, what do we make of the fact that Wilson's intelligibility as both a person and a potential subject of disability rights, require him becoming intelligible as an entrepreneur?

Within the context of 25/40, Burch's choice to invest Wilson with humanity by way of his "entrepreneurial spirit" had the effect of imbuing entrepreneurship with not only political and economic, but historical value. If 25/40 sought to commemorate the ADA as legislation that turned disabled Americans into entrepreneurial Americans, Burch's speech expanded this historiographic project, providing an anachronistic alibi for the ADA's existence on the basis that disabled entrepreneurs, like Wilson, could not benefit from such legislation. (Even though Wilson survived the passage of the ADA by more than a decade, he was unsuccessful in using the ADA to contest his own institutionalization). But reviewing some tensions between Burch's remarks on the panel and the way that she and Joyner address the "entrepreneurial spirit" in their biography of Wilson establishes a more nuanced understanding of how and why Wilson's entrepreneurship can be politically meaningful in ways irreducible to 25/40's neoliberal agenda, as well as how uncritical venerations of disabled entrepreneurship prove to be even more insidious than the mode of disability historiography described above.

Burch and Joyner's *Unspeakable: The Junius Wilson Story,* represents disabled entrepreneurship not as an unqualified good, but as desirable insofar as it suggests economic freedom relative to the forced labor Wilson and other inmates performed during their institutionalization.[63] The authors describe, for example, how in the wake of *Buck V. Bell* (1927), in which the Supreme Court legitimized the forcible sterilization of people with intellectual disabilities, the hospital instrumentalized compulsory sterilization as a means of enlisting hospital inmates' labor. Following his own castration, Wilson was removed from the hospital's criminal ward and moved to the farm ward, where he and other inmates performed agricultural labor in order to sustain the institution. Burch and Joyner write:

> Before, [Wilson] had been a drain on the meager resources of the institution. Once castrated, Wilson was considered less threatening, less in need of close supervision. He was likely to be calm and controlled. Additionally, his labor could be used to contribute to the institution. As [hospital administrator] Linville wrote on the sterilization follow-up form just a few months after Wilson's castration, the deaf inmate was "now on the farm doing manual work.[64]

Burch and Joyner's attention to the political economy of institutionalization exceeds attention to the fact that "at the hospital farm…[Wilson] worked to help pay for his

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[63] Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner, *Unspeakable: The Life of Junius Wilson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[64] Ibid., 49.

institutionalization."[65] They note, for example, how the hospital "rented patients out to local farmers during cotton season," and furthermore highlight that "the state of North Carolina commonly used institutionalized people for free labor" ever "since the days of reconstruction."[66] The exploitation of patients as laborers was a profoundly racialized practice in the Jim Crow South, and "institutions for black Carolinians, typically housing more concentrated populations of inmates than did white institutions, tended to have larger farms and workforces."[67]

Within the context of the asylum in which compulsory unpaid labor was the norm, it becomes possible to interpret Wilson's elective, remunerated labor as (relatively) liberating, perhaps explaining Burch's optimistic framing of his entrepreneurialism in her remarks at 25/40. But Burch and Joyner's ambivalent orientation toward entrepreneurship does not only wane when it is understood as a viable alternative to chattel slavery by another name. They note, for example, how the success of Wilson's entrepreneurial ventures were predicated upon charitable sentiments that allowed hospital employees to purchase candy at inflated prices from a deaf black man and to feel that they had exceeded their moral responsibility to the man whose forced institutionalization their labor abetted. But the violence of entrepreneurialism far exceeded its role as the oil that greased the wheels of the state hospital's affective machinery. If entrepreneurialism was what provided Wilson the opportunity to purchase bicycles that would allow him to test the physical and affective boundaries of institutional life, it also guaranteed that he would never truly transgress them.

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[65] Ibid., 51.

[66] Ibid., 56-7.

[67] Ibid., 57.

At one point in the 1980s, the hospital took initial steps to see if de-institutionalizing Wilson was a possibility.[68] In theory, Medicare or Medicaid could have funded care workers that would have allowed Wilson to live in a significantly less restrictive environment than a state institution. But Wilson's required "'work therapy'" at the institution was not legally considered work, and he was thus ineligible for Medicare because he was "considered unemployed and did not pay taxes into the system."[69] Wilson was also ruled ineligible for Medicaid because of the success of his entrepreneurial ventures: his $7,000 in savings meant that he had acquired too much wealth to use government programs to aid in this de-institutionalization process.[70] Burch and Joyner emphasize this in no uncertain terms:

> Wilsons' entrepreneurial abilities – selling fishing worms, running errands, and selling snacks to staff and patients – earned him status and praise on campus. But the same activities, according to health care policies and bureaucrats, disqualified Wilson from other care options. Efforts to achieve a more "normal" life – by Wilson and by the medical system – ultimately justified keeping Wilson in Cherry Hospital.[71]

The wealth Wilson accrued through his entrepreneurialism was perhaps one of many factors that contributed to his continued institutionalization. The government policies that refused to define coerced labor as labor per se, or that seemed unable to account for Wilson's idiosyncratic relationship to work and wealth, both inadvertently made Wilson's entrepreneurship compulsory and thwarted the possibility of that entrepreneurship liberating him from the grounds of the institution.[72] It was Wilson's entrepreneurialism relative to a particular set of political, economic, and socio-cultural circumstances that obstructed his

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[68] Ibid., 108.

[69] Ibid., 109.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 78-79.

release, not a general idea of entrepreneurialism. But Burch's presentation at 25/40 risked uncritically celebrating entrepreneurialism in such a way that evacuated the term and its political effects of any historical specificity. Wilson's own entrepreneurial acumen would continue to haunt him in both symbolic and material ways to the end of his life. Legal intervention regarding Wilson's wrongful institutionalization resulted in the state hospital renovating a three-bedroom cottage on the edge of campus as a home for Wilson, where he experienced comparative degrees of both freedom and isolation relative to his previous living arrangement.[73] When the hospital staff moved Wilson into his new home, they subscribed to several magazines on his behalf: tucked between *Ebony* and *Field and Stream* were issues of *Black Enterprise.*[74]

The visual and material space NMAH afforded Wilson's effects further solidified this entrepreneurial caricature, delivering a celebratory account of Wilson's entrepreneurship without contextualizing the insidious economic and political violence that made it possible for such labor to appear liberating while nevertheless further guaranteeing that Wilson would never again know life outside of an institution. NMAH featured Wilson's ephemera within its only exhibit dedicated to disability history, a glass-encased wall display approximately twenty feet long and ten feet high. Wilson's yellow Schwinn – the last bicycle he purchased – was physically and visually arresting. Undoubtedly, the bicycle and the five-sentence biography of Wilson accompanying it were the exhibit's centerpieces, diverting attention away from other materials in the exhibit: images of disabled poster children from the mid-twentieth century; boots belonging to Republican disability activist Justin Dart; the pen that

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[73] Ibid., 209.

[74] Ibid., 168.

George H.W. Bush purportedly used to sign the ADA (the Kennedy Center claimed to be displaying this pen as well).

Wilson's bright bicycle may have drawn attention away from much of the text and ephemera on exhibit within the display case, but it also highlighted another disabled black entrepreneur: Lois Curtis. Immediately to the right of Wilson's bicycle were a ceramic angel and two drawings, one of a young black woman in a blue dress and the other of a dog. The drawings partially obscure a photograph mounted on the back wall of the display case. Within the photograph, a woman's face is further hidden by the chain link fence before her, as she stands at the edge of a green lawn. Perhaps this photograph represents Curtis occupying a position once occupied by Wilson: the brink of de-institutionalization. The adjacent signage informs museum visitors, "These drawings and this ceramic angel were made by Lois Curtis. After successfully filing suit to be released from an institution, Curtis now lives in a community where she helps support herself through her art."

The political work performed by Curtis's artwork and biography was manifold: the two pieces signaled that Wilson was far from exceptional, and rendered disabled entrepreneurs of color as a critical agents within U.S. disability history. By framing Curtis's arts entrepreneurship as integral to Curtis's successful campaign to live outside of an institution, the exhibit also offered a historical and political corrective to the dimensions of disabled entrepreneurship absented from Burch's narration of Wilson's life during the festival. That the exhibit celebrated Curtis's entrepreneurship in the form of artistic labor in particular – drawing and ceramics – also signals a change from the modes of physical labor and resale schemes that Wilson put into operation. By juxtaposing Curtis's works alongside visual representations of her institutionalization, the exhibit evokes legacies of "outsider art" in the form of "untrained" artistic production under the auspices of psychiatric power.[75] But it simultaneously marks disabled people of color in general, and psychiatric survivors in particular, as rightful participants of the so-called "creative class," their artistic labor indelibly inside rather than outside of neoliberal capitalism. In so doing, the exhibit lauds Curtis's arts work not – or at least not only – because of the social freedoms that Curtis experiences by virtue of her de-institutionalization, but because it is how she "helps support herself"—in other words, arts work becomes the way that she alleviates the financial burden of her disability on the state. Curtis's presence encourages spectators to consider the various ways that disabled entrepreneurship pursued through or understood in terms of artistic labor manifest in the festival. The next section pursues another line of analysis regarding the intersection of disability entrepreneurship and arts work.

The Disabled Actor as Entrepreneurial Solo Performer

The disabled artist also emerged as an entrepreneur within the context of 25/40's screening of the documentary *Becoming Bulletproof* (dir. Michael Barnett, 2014).[76] This concern was not internal to the documentary itself (the film does not address or represent disabled entrepreneurship in any explicit way), but sutured as a supplement to the film through a post-screening conversation between NMAH curator Katherine Ott and disabled actor Zach Gottsagen, who appeared in the documentary. This section addresses the film and its approach to disability and work by examining how the post-screening conversation mapped entrepreneurship onto the disabled actor (both Gottsagen in particular and the figure of the

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[75] Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (London: Praeger, 1972).

[76] *Becoming Bulletproof*, Directed by Michael Barnett (2014; New York, NY: Virgil Films, 2016), DVD.

disabled actor more generally). 25/40's representations of Junius Wilson sought to render disabled people's capacities for entrepreneurship as evidence of their humanity, as a historiographic alibi for the Americans with Disabilities Act, and as a retroactive narrativization of entrepreneurship as the political project of the disability rights movement. The conversation following *Becoming Bulletproof* took a different tactic, dragging the historical association of disability performance with autobiographical performance art in an effort to read the disabled performer as necessarily entrepreneurial.

The post-show conversation's representation of disabled performers as entrepreneurs did not adulterate more progressive representations of disability and work within the documentary itself. *Bulletproof* is a troubling film with numerous neoliberal projects, and betrays profoundly ableist attitudes, especially as it concerns economies of care and the capacities of disabled subjects for mimetic or otherwise theatrical labor. However critical I am of discourses and practices that uncritically celebrate and seek to produce disabled subjects as entrepreneurs, it might be possible to understand efforts to entrepreneurialize the disabled performer that unfolded within the post-screening conversation as itself critical of the film's mutually constitutive ableist attitudes and neoliberal investments.

Becoming Bulletproof is a documentary about the efforts of a film production company, Zeno Mountain Farms, to produce a Spaghetti Western with an integrated cast of disabled actors and nondisabled actors. The nondisabled actors appearing in the film largely consist of members of the film production company itself, Ila Halby, Peter Halby, and Vanessa Halby. The film begins with Atlanta-based actor A.J. Murray, then 30, an African-American man with "severe" (the film's language) cerebral palsy receiving a last-minute invitation to join the cast of *Bulletproof Jackson*. It concludes with their film's premiere at a theatre in Los

Angeles. In between, the documentary interlaces production outtakes and scenes from the final film with backstage scenes such as improvisation classes, rehearsals, love connections, and domestic life (the entire cast takes up residence at the Halby's home during filmmaking). Along the way, *Becoming Bulletproof* documents a project that members of Zeno Mountain Farm understand to be both a "massive social experiment" in cross-ability collaboration, as well as a sincere attempt to make "good art."[77]

Both thematically and structurally, *Becoming Bulletproof* shows explicit interest in disabled people's capacities to do the work of mimetic representation, but it denies that those capacities might translate into, or be in and of themselves, waged work. The documentary repeatedly features scenes in which the disabled actors, most of whom have intellectual or developmental disabilities, receive direction (usually from Peter Halby) and "fail" to successfully execute a gesture, affect, or intonation prescribed by their nondisabled collaborators. Yet the film insists on representing this "massive social experiment" as occurring outside of – and uninflected by – economic relations. In a moment of direct address, Peter Halby assures the documentary's spectators-to-be that none of the actors pay to participate in Zeno Mountain Farm's productions, nor does anyone receive payment for appearing in the film.

That the cast – disabled or otherwise – of an independent film receives no remuneration is disconcertingly common within an artistic economy in which actors and other arts workers are enlisted to donate their talents in exchange for visibility and "opportunity," deferring economic remuneration to an imagined future. But the film is quite clear that the members of Zeno Mountain Farm have little optimism about (or interest in) their disabled collaborators' receiving meaningful waged work as actors, or indeed, them ever

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[77] Ibid.

performing outside of the production company's recurring summer experiment. In light of this departure from more familiar and conventionalized forms of labor exploitation that pervade contemporary arts economies, it is important to note that the Halbys' collective fantasy that their productions exist outside of economic relations depends on the production company not hiring any attendant care workers for the many disabled cast members who require significant assistance with bathing, dressing, and eating, and other daily activities of self care. Instead, nondisabled members of the cast perform this care labor, although they have no training or experience as care laborers outside of their participation in past Zeno Mountain Farm productions. Rather than understanding this care structure as an unfortunate restriction imposed upon the film production process because of limited funding or the unavailability of publicly-funded care, Zeno represents this economy of care as one of its experiment's defining assets, one that Vanessa Halby deems a desirable alternative to the way that the disabled actors otherwise experience care relations in their day-to-day lives: "This is the only time in their lives when people aren't spending time with them because they are paid to," she says.[78]

Disabled Americans and their care workers are not always in harmonious political agreement, with, as labor historians Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein amply demonstrate in *Caring for America*, asymmetrical power relationships and unresolved tensions between (often impoverished) disabled Americans who desire home care they can afford and autonomy over who cares for them, and care workers who desire stable employment and living wages.[79] But Vanessa Halby's construction of Zeno's system as a more authentic care structure unsullied

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

by the presence of waged labor also ignores that paid care labor is integral to making independent living outside of institutions possible for disabled Americans. Furthermore, given that many of the disabled actors who require a significant amount of care live with their parents (who Halby understands as receiving money to care for their children), shores up modes of (anti)welfare reform that have contested the ability of family members to receive wages from Medicare and Medicaid for the care labor they perform.[80]

Becoming Bulletproof couples this depiction of Zeno Mountain Farm as a model community of care unimpeded by capital (or job training) with a construction of its filmmaking as an annually recurring opportunity for disabled people to escape routinized discrimination in casting. But just as the documentary recognizes the experiment as impermanent and suggests that the actors will have to readjust to the ostensibly debauched care relations to which they are accustomed, it hints at no promise, or hope, that these actors will have the opportunity to perform meaningful or sustaining work outside of Zeno Mountain Farm's projects. This manifests most explicitly in a scene in which Vanessa Halby nods in affirmation as A.J. declares that he knows he could "never" play a leading role on a primetime crime serial such as *CSI*, but that it might be possible for him to play a smaller role if that character had CP. Halby's knowing nods seem less an effort to register systemic ableism than it does to express relief that A.J. has adjusted his expectations – perhaps his "occupational realism" – accordingly.[81]

Despite *Becoming Bulletproof*'s resistance to framing anyone in the film as working, entrepreneurship still emerged as a pronounced concern when screened as part of 25/40. Following the screening, Katherine Ott, an NMAH curator responsible for many of the

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[80] Ibid.

[81] For a discussion of acting and occupational realism, see Chapter 2.

Festival ADA efforts, joined Zach Gottsagen, an intellectually disabled actor who played a villain in *Bulletproof Jackson*. As he is represented in the documentary, Gottsagen lives independently in Tampa, Florida, where he works part-time as a teaching artist at a children's theatre and pursues his own creative work. At the conclusion of the screening, Gottsagen, dressed in a suit, emerged from the front row of NMAH's Warner Brothers' Theater and joined Ott for a talkback. Ott opened the talkback by posing some initial questions herself before opening up the conversation to the audience. After some queries about his own preparation for the film and his dream roles, the questions devolved rapidly when Ott asked first, "Do you use costumes off set?" and then "Do you write your own lines?" The first question might initially appear the more condescending of the two. Ott was not, in this moment, initiating a dialogue about the porousness of the boundaries between onscreen and offscreen performance and the theatricality of everyday life. Rather, she seemed to ask about his potential off-stage use of on-stage costumes in order to collapse Gottsagen's work as an actor and play practices. But it was Ott's second question that proves more troublesome and that introduces the question of the entrepreneur.

"Do you write your own lines?" is an odd question to pose to Gottsagen. For the prior eighty minutes, the audience watched documentary footage in which Gottsagen and his collaborators receive direction from the Halbys and work to perform the screenplay "right." Again and again, *Becoming Bulletproof* shows the numerous failed takes preceding the disabled cast members producing with sufficient mimetic precision the sounds, affects, and gestures prescribed by the production team. And yet when given the opportunity to discuss his craft with him, Ott posed the question: "Do you write your own lines?" If Ott were curious about whether his artistic interests included not only performing, but writing, she might have asked: "Are you interested in writing as well as acting?" or "Have you written your lines in the past?" Ott's specific articulation of the question, "Do you write your own lines?" suggests her belief in Gottsagen's authorship of the material he performs, and constructs this self-authorship as a perpetual fact of his performance work: past, present, and future.

Ott's suggestion that Gottsagen might write his own lines produces an entrepreneurializing effect in the Foucauldian sense, seeing in Gottsagen a disabled artist who is both playwright and performer (and producer and designer and…): his body as a machine, his capital in the form of his own person. In the case of a disabled actor, such entrepreneurial effects derive from pervasive understandings of disabled people as the limits of or external to representation, as the ontic real against which the mimetically capacitated nondisabled actor becomes intelligible.[82] Phrased differently, the speculation that Gottsagen has been writing his own lines all along draws upon an understanding of disabled performers as only able to play the selfsame, to speak words original to himself and not language that exists outside of him and prior to him. Even when he plays a villain in a Spaghetti Western written by someone else and even when we encounter him playing that role through the further mediating form of a documentary about the film in which his acting appeared, Gottsagen, perhaps like other disabled actors, cannot help but appear, to Ott and others, as a solo performer.

Ott's impulse to cast Gottsagen as a solo performance artist reveals ableist prejudices about the representational capacities of disabled people, but it also echoes with disability performance theorist Carrie Sandahl's scholarship on the historical affinities between disability culture and solo performance. Such affinities resonate with the fact that solo performance has proven a popular performance mode in the late twentieth and early twenty-

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[82] Carrie Sandahl, "The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training." In *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 255-68.

first century United States through which artists have explored sociocultural identities with regards to sexuality, gender, race, and ethnicity. But Sandahl notes the genre's additional appeal for disabled artists, for whom the physical inaccessibility of the stage (and the house) in mainstream venues have led disabled artists to pursue opportunities in alternative (and smaller) venues, and points out these venues have profoundly shaped aesthetic and stylistic choices by disabled performance artists. Sandhal also writes that autobiographical solo performances are often understood to "'privilege "reality" over "fictionality," or at least toy with those terms, in that the 'author is present onstage in the body of the performer.'"[83]

Many performance theorists, myself included, would contest the suggestion that performances of self in autobiographical modes are somehow less enmeshed in representation, somehow less mediated, than non-autobiographical performance modes. But my interest at present is how intense associations of authenticity and reality (and by extension, autobiographical solo performance) map onto disability, even to the extent that these frame *all* disabled actors as de facto solo performers; how these mappings might not only derive from ableist sentiments that fix disability as the limit of representation, but how they might also derive from (and further produce) understandings of the disabled as entrepreneurs of the self. Might Ott's question, then, be both a symptom of broadened discourses about disability and representation and an effect of newly understood relationships between artistic labor and identitarian difference under neoliberal capitalism?

Perhaps Ott's entrepreneurial reading of Gottsagen was intended to have a liberating function analogous to entrepreneurship's intended deployment in Burch and Joyner's biography of Junius Wilson. The scenes from *Becoming Bulletproof* that show Gottsagen and

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[83] Carrie Sandahl, "Queering the Crip or Cripping the Queer: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance." *GLQ* 9.1-2 (2003): 25-56, at 28-9.

other disabled actors receiving direction are ableist in their suggestion of a unidirectional flow of original, correct, and ideal enactment from nondisabled directors to disabled actors, repeatedly showing the disabled actors' "failure" to precisely inhabit the world articulated by the screenplay. The documentary represents their divergences from the script *as* failures, rather than as aesthetic innovations. The film develops paradoxical investments in both featuring disabled people *as actors* and as mimetically incapacitated performers incapable of playing other. In so doing, it depends upon mutually constituting exceptionalisms: understanding the mimetic as an exceptional bodily practice, one for which the disabled subject is particularly ill-equipped, if not entirely incapacitated. Yet as performance theorist Rebecca Schneider has contended, "theatricality, like interpretation, is not the loss of some prior actual….mimesis is what we *do*."[84] Read in tandem with *Becoming Bulletproof*, Schneider's anti-anti-theatricality corroborates disability-affirming understandings of the disabled subject in performance. *Becoming Bulletproof* wants disabled actors to pass, to the extent possible, as nondisabled. Yet it also wants their contributions to the film to emerge from their participation as disabled-identified actors, rather than from the aesthetic and stylistic contributions of their performances. Ott's speculation that Gottsagen was a solo performer inventing his own lines, then, might be understood as a speculation that by interrupting the cinematic world he was supposed to inhabit, he contested the ableist insistence that mimetic precision be the goal for disabled actors.

Other performances at 25/40 insist that we think of this push to entrepreneurship as part of the ADA's legacy of failing to effectively provide anti-discrimination employment protections to disabled people. Consider two contributions by solo performers that

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[84] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 18.

effectively framed 25/40. Comedian Shannon DeVido was 25/40's first act. She began her routine by pointing to the ADA's legacy as a failed civil rights bill. "The ADA is turning twenty-five this week," DeVido smirks, "this is perhaps why it has suffered from some failed relationships, moved back in with its parents, and people refuse to take it seriously."[85] Notably, DeVido does not explicitly discuss the ways in which "people refuse to take [the ADA] seriously," except through her accounts of her entrepreneurial exploits. But the relationship between performance, entrepreneurship, and the ADA's failure as articulated by DeVido, and then Ott, became far more overt during the final performance event of 25/40, "Jean Kennedy Smith Series: Disability + Culture," which included speeches venerating Smith, a series of performances, a concert by Diane Schuur, and journalist Judy Woodruff hosting an interview with four disabled artists. This interview segment featured jazz pianist Justin Kauflin, photographer Sophie Kaftler, actor J.P. Illarremendi, and actress/comedian Maysoon Zayid. Zayid, who is Palestinian-American, has cerebral palsy and is best known for her solo show *Little American Whore*, various TED Talks, and appearances on and writing for Keith Olbermann's television shows. She was a powerful vocal presence on the stage of the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall, such a force that Woodruff even interrupted her, saying "well, that's a different conversation," when Zayid proclaimed that she experiences more discrimination on the basis of gender than on the basis of her disability in her pursuit of a career in comedy.

Zayid's pointed critiques of unbridled enthusiasm for disability entrepreneurship occurred a couple of questions into the interview, when Woodruff asked the artists whether they understood their disability as a resource for their art making. Zayid responded by saying, "I wish I could say 'yes,'" and noted that because of her disability, she gets written off

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[85] *Josh Blue and Shannon DeVido.*

every time that she walks into an audition. Indeed, it is pervasive ableism, and the fact that, "we live in a world where twenty-five years after the Americans with Disabilities Act, Hollywood feels that it doesn't need to comply," that has spurred her turn away from film acting and toward solo performance and standup comedy. She understands her pursuits as a solo performer and entrepreneur of the self to be compromises she must make in order to create employment opportunities for herself, since the ADA has failed to provide adequate anti-discrimination protection in the area of employment. In response to Woodruff's final question about what she would like to see happen in the next fifty years, Zayid said that attending to access is not enough and that ableism needs to be confronted, a response that received profuse clapping and whooping from the audience. Zayid's contributions to the panel turned some of the most earnest and uncritical affirmations of entrepreneurship on their head: she refused to dwell in more ambivalent spaces offered by solo performance as a mode of political possibility and instead focused on the continued violence of structural discrimination against disabled performers in the commercial theatre, film, and television industries.

"Occupy Our Front Steps," or, Crawling Toward Entrepreneurship

Two sets of stairs flank the National Museum of American History's entrance on Constitution Avenue. But when I first encountered the stairs during 25/40, their status as stairs appeared up for debate. Signs around the stairs reading "No Access to the National Mall," seemed to disavow the stairs' ability to lead to a knowable elsewhere, instead trumpeting their capacity to be something else: works of portraiture. The riser of each step was painted so that, collectively, they formed portraits of two leading disabled women activists: Tia Nelis, a leader in the self-advocacy movement (Figure 6), and Kathy Martinez, a blind Latina lesbian and former Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy (Figure 7).

FIGURE 6
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY STAIR PORTRAIT OF TIA NELIS.
Source: "Google Impact Public Engagement: The ADA." Accessed June 14, 2016.
https://www.google.org/impactchallenge/disabilities/ada.html

FIGURE 7
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY STAIR PORTRAIT OF KATHY MARTINEZ.
Source: "Google Impact Public Engagement: The ADA." Accessed June 14, 2016.
https://www.google.org/impactchallenge/disabilities/ada.html

Each image was accompanied by three sets of text painted upon the stairs. The riser of the first stair clarifies that Google sponsored this portraiture in commemoration of the Capitol Crawl, one of the most significant direct actions in U.S. disability history and one whose ethics and politics remain hotly contested in disability circles.[86] On March 12, 1990, sixty activists choreographed their exclusion from the life of the nation-state, abandoning their wheelchairs, crutches, and other mobility aids before crawling up the eighty-odd steps to the Capitol building on their hands and knees.[87] They crawled to protest the lethargic pace at which the ADA was moving through the House and the Senate. Like historians and activists before it, the Google-sponsored text placed the Capitol Crawl and the passage of the ADA within a teleological narrative of political progress:

> In 1990, people with disabilities pulled themselves up the U.S. Capitol steps and demanded equal rights – an action that led to the Americans with Disabilities Act. For its 25th Anniversary, we celebrate disability rights leaders, both past and present.

Quotations from the portrait's respective subjects appeared higher up on the staircase, in larger text stylized so as to appear handwritten. Nelis challenges the medical discourses that reduce people with disabilities to "clients and patients" rather than full members of their communities, i.e. "friends, co-workers, and neighbors," and Martinez emphasizes the imperative to "advance[e] employment opportunities and expectations for people with disabilities" as an economic and moral good. At the top of each staircase, smaller text provides a cursory biography of the portrait's subject and reviews her contributions to U.S. disability history.

I want to dwell here upon the complicated and contradictory performances these stairs scripted and to consider what they might have to do with the festival's broader interest in trumpeting disability entrepreneurship as the chief legacy of the ADA. I draw upon Robin

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[86] The website for the campaign summarizes the Google Impact Challenge thusly: "The world is not currently built for everyone. But we believe if we all come together, we can change that. Our focus is on building awareness, identifying solutions and helping create more access and opportunities for people with disabilities." Accessed 14 June 2016. https://www.google.org/impactchallenge/disabilities/about.htm

[87] Davis, 191-216.

Bernstein's theorization of the "scriptive thing" in suggesting that the stairs script behavior.[88] For Bernstein, a scriptive thing is a (purportedly) inanimate nonhuman entity that, "like a play script, broadly structures a performance while simultaneously allowing and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable."[89] Bernstein's analysis foregrounds material culture as the province of scriptive things and accounts for how race, gender, sexuality, and class inform the dynamic choreographies between things and the humans with which they partner. Disability is a useful category for a more expansive account of which things become scriptive and how they do so, both because "disability" hails a variety of bodies, minds, and affects, and because disabled embodiments challenge received notions of the boundaries of bodies, material objects, and built environments.

To me, a person both ambulatory and sighted, the stairs and their accompanying signage said, with stark literalism: *don't climb me*. There are, of course, many non-ambulatory people for whom all stairs always say *don't climb me*, and NMAH's stair portraiture sought precisely to commemorate an occasion on which dozens of disabled Americans simultaneously exposed that script and its insidious inverse: *if you want to climb me, you're going to have to do it on your hands and knees*. Stairs, of course, are not architecturally, visually, or functionally uniform, and NMAH's stairs that lead "nowhere" differ in many respects from the stairs leading to the literal and symbolic center of the legislative branch of U.S. politics. The NMAH stairs script human behavior through the combination of their materiality, visual and textual inscriptions; the subjectivity and capacities of those who encounter them; the "No Access" signage; information about the stairs on the museum's website; and young,

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[88] Robin Bernstein, "Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race." *Social Text* 27.4 (2009): 67-94.

[89] Ibid., 69.

white, seemingly nondisabled women employed by Google who encouraged museum visitors to take pictures of themselves with the stair portraits and post them to social media with the hashtag "#ADA25."

Given both the context of 25/40 and the particular political protest these stairs sought to commemorate, it is bemusing that the stairs' materiality and appeals to normative – even acute – visuality assumed nondisabled people as their script's primary addressees. From a distance, I was able to read the largest text on the stairs, the "handwritten" text quoting the portrait's respective subjects. The Google byline and text describing the Capitol Crawl proved more difficult, not only because of the smaller font, but also because of the words' organization. The text on the stairs adheres to dominant English-language conventions by reading left to right. But the stairs elaborate their prose in ascending – rather than descending – order. In order for the text to make sense, you must read it not only left to right, but also bottom to top, moving "up" three stairs as you progress through the prose. The text mimicked the logic of the stairs themselves, requiring visitors to climb (or crawl) the stairs through their reading, making it difficult (for this reader, at least) to apprehend it. The choice to arrange the text in this way proved all the more striking because the other two blocks of text were printed in descending order (left to right, top to bottom). Thus, the first sentences of Nelis's and Martinez's biographies were the highest placed text on the entire portrait. They were also the smallest. Indeed, I had to walk more than halfway up the stairs before I was able to read them. How are we to make sense of this stair portraiture, an art instillation that purports to commemorate an activist protest demanding a more accessible future and yet demands both ambulation and sightedness in order to access it? What, if anything, might this corporate-sponsored instillation at a state-sponsored museum tell us about disability and the state of entrepreneurship?

Other iterations of Google-sponsored stair portraiture highlight the incomprehensibility of the design choices at NMAH.[90] These other stair portraits appear on the steps outside of or within other Smithsonian sites and feature a combination of activists and politicians instrumental in the ADA's passage. For example, leading activists Ed Roberts and Judith Heuman appear alongside paralympic athlete Tayana McFadden upon the steps to the National Portrait Gallery.[91] Some of the portraits signify the disability of their subjects by representing assistive technologies (Ed Roberts's portrait includes a breathing tube), whereas other portraits omit visual representation of disability. These stair portraits feature the same information (a pithy quotation, a brief biography, a statement on the Capitol Crawl) that appeared on the stairs at NMAH, but they do not share the same textual conventions. Uniformly, the text inscribed on these other portraits read in descending order. Many of these other portraits featured significantly fewer steps than the twenty-step portraits of Martinez and Nelis. A reduction in the number of stairs does not render the portraits more physically accessible, but this new shape does make it possible for sighted people to apprehend the entire portrait and accompanying text without climbing the stairs.[92]

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[90] I became aware of these other portraits after I had completed my research in Washington D.C., and rely on documentation of these portraits from the Google Impact Challenge's website. https://www.google.org/impactchallenge/disabilities/ada.html

[91] Patrick Kennedy and Justin Dart Jr., a disabled Republican who helped implement the ADA and led the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped throughout the 1980s appear on steps before the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center. A staircase within the Newseum's interior features former Senator Tom Harkin, one of the ADA's primary architects. Claudia Gordon, a deaf black woman currently working at the Department of Labor, is painted upon the steps of the Kellog Conference Center at her alma matter, Gallaudet University. The steps leading to the Historical Society of Washington feature a quotation by President George H.W. Bush, who signed the ADA into law, but no portrait accompanies the text.

[92] The documentation of the stair portraits on the Google Impact website betrays this difference. Whereas the photographs of the NMAH portraits do not include the text about

Furthermore, the stairs featuring these portraits are primary routes of entry to (or within) their respective institutions. The NMAH portraits, however, lead to a landing that wraps halfway around the museum but does not provide entrance to the museum. In this way, the non-NMAH portraits seem to record the prior physical inaccessibility of various buildings, their combined materiality and portraiture inviting (sighted) visitors to apprehend the inaccessibility and look for architectural features, such as ramps, that might enable physically disabled people to enter.

A generous reading might refuse to distinguish between the NMAH stairs and the other iterations of stair portraiture in Washington, D.C. institutions. Might the repurposing of the NMAH stairs as portraiture – precisely because these stairs do not provide access to a useful, desirable location for anyone, regardless of ability status – offer a savvy resignification of barriers to physical access? Perhaps the "No Access" signage enables the NMAH stair portraiture to script the stairs' invitation (or non-invitation) as "don't climb me" regardless of ability status. Still, the stairs do lead *somewhere*, and to suggest the equation of access for the ambulatory and non-ambulatory alike risks sedimenting restrictive definitions of the arenas of public life to which disabled Americans deserve access. That the repurposing of the purpose-less stairs depended upon visual apprehension of image and text further suggests a compromised commitment to access.[93] The inability of this generous reading to

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the Capitol Crawl, the other portraits feature the steps, portrait, and text in their entirety. The elimination of this text from photographic documentation suggests less an accidental elision than the impossibility of apprehending the entirety of the portrait within a single frame. Google's choice to represent the NMAH stair portraits in this manner reinforces my suggestion that viewers would need to – visually or physically – climb these portraits in order to engage them in their entirety.

[93] There did not appear to be any readily available audio description that would provide an account of the stair portraits to blind visitors. NMAH provides audio-described tours upon request, but only "America on the Move" is currently listed as having audio descriptions

account for expansive understandings of access pushes us to look elsewhere for an explanation. Whatever the intentions of the museum and the corporate sponsor, the design and organization of text on the stairs failed to cultivate a robust sense of accessibility, even though questions of access and belonging were precisely at hand.

This failure may have been the point. The Smithsonian Institution's website for the 25/40 programming instructs museum visitors to "Occupy our front steps!"[94] I only saw this instruction after I had already climbed the stairs myself in order to read the uppermost text. My own ambulatory engagement with the stairs *as* stairs inadvertently obeyed the Smithsonian's command. What do we make of this invitation not simply to engage the stairs but to occupy them, given that these portraits commemorate an occasion on which activists made evident the symbolic and material ways inaccessible architectures excluded disabled people from national life? With the injunction to "occupy our steps," the museum enjoined visitors to participate in a temporally distributed and geographically displaced reenactment of the Capitol Crawl.

I only saw one other museum visitor engage the steps. I happened upon this visitor, an ambulatory white woman – on the landing at the top of the stairs. Perhaps she, too, was curious about that nondescript elsewhere to which the steps led. Perhaps she, too, could not read the uppermost text and traveled up the stairs to make out what it said. Perhaps she, too, had a non-physical disability and, like non-physically disabled disability activists who

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integrated within the exhibit itself. The absence of any readily available accessibility measures was striking in light of the fact that the portraits were sponsored by a tech company advertising its commitment to accessibility, and because it is the blind technology user – both at 25/40 and more broadly – who has emerged as the paradigmatic disabled subject in discussions about technology and access.

[94] "ADA: 25 Years of Disability Rights." Accessed 14 June 2016. http://americanhistory.si.edu/topics/disability-history/pages/ada-25-years-disability-civil-rights-july-22-26

participated in the Capitol Crawl in 1990, performed physical disability as she crawled up the stairs. Perhaps when I wasn't looking, people with and without physical disabilities staged a complex choreography of access, walking and crawling up the stairs in tandem, following the stairs' scripts while collaboratively exposing their "normate" imperatives.[95] Perhaps the fact that I never witnessed any such choreography evinces not the failure of the stairs to script human behavior, but visitors' resistance to the stairs' hail—a scripting in and of itself As Bernstein notes, things script not only when "we individually or collectively accept the invitation to dance," but also when we "refuse it, accept but improvise new steps, or renegotiate, deconstruct, or explode roles of leader and follower."[96]

Following the logic of stairs and the name of the protest performance that the stair portraits commemorate, I have been using the language of "climbing" and "crawling" the stairs. But perhaps more precise attention to the Smithsonian's language may help us discern the NMAH stair portraits' script(s). Via Google, the Smithsonian Institution invites people who encounter the portraits to "occupy our front steps." In the context of the United States in 2015, the language of occupation cannot help but evoke Occupy Wall Street and related modes of anti-capitalist protest. That contemporary anti-capitalist imperatives to "occupy" manifest within what is essentially tantamount to a public relations scheme for Google seems an ironic but uninspired and unsurprising co-optation of contemporary protest practices, or at least the language within which those practices are cast. But it also confuses the political work of durational habitation at work in both the Occupy Wall Street movement from which it borrows its rhetoric and the Capitol Crawl which it seeks to re-play across steps

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[95] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 8.

[96] Bernstein, 73.

other than the steps upon which the original protest actually transpired. As Rebecca Schneider notes, "For OWS, 'to occupy' means to pitch camp and visibly *live* in the site of protest," a kind of prolonged waiting Schneider invests with resistant potential.

But a different temporality is at work in both the original Capitol Crawl protests and their scripted reenactment at NMAH. To occupy and to climb/crawl are not oppositional, but neither are they synonymous. Occupying the steps would require climbing/crawling at least the first step. But whereas climbing and crawling suggest movement and progress forward and upward, "occupying" connotes stasis, albeit stasis achieved by and occasionally punctuated with movement (vertically, horizontally, and otherwise).[97] Occupations move but nonetheless insist upon dwelling, remaining, persisting. Crawling/climbing and occupying differ in emphasis rather than in kind. The display of endurance of physically disabled activists who crawled the steps of the Capitol in 1990, some taking close to an hour to reach the top, is particularly effective at throwing the crawling/occupying dyad into crisis. In one popularly excerpted representation of the protest, Jennifer Keelan, an eight-year-old with cerebral palsy, announced, "I'll take all night if I have to!" as she pulled herself up each of the eighty-three steps.[98] If one can't help but occupy the steps when crawling to the top, crawling is a necessary precursor to those who are enjoined – or choose – to occupy.

Occupation has other meanings as well: we occupy not only spaces but also roles. One might occupy a space that is not hers. But an occupation is also something that one might have. Within the precarity of life under neoliberal capitalism, an occupation might be defined as that which one does not have, or that which one is compelled to have too many

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[97] Of course, the connotation of occupation shifts with regards to the "what" of the occupation, be it Zuccotti Park or the Gaza Strip.

[98] Davis, 193.

of. At the same time that the Smithsonian website's instructions emphasized "occupation" in the sense of durational dwelling within or upon a space, the text on the stairs themselves emphasized occupation in this latter sense, in terms of employment. One portrait features Tia Nelis encouraging spectators to perceive disabled people through an economic lens, as "co-workers." Even more explicitly, text under the portrait of Kathy Martinez emphasizes that "advancing employment opportunities and expectations for people with disabilities strengthens not only America's economy, but our moral fiber." Through the stair portraiture, NMAH and Google both charged museum visitors with occupying the stairs and occupying disabled Americans. In so doing, 25/40 pushed to mark not only the Americans with Disabilities Act and contemporary disability politics but also past political actions as primarily concerned with employment.

Did NMAH, Google, and other parties involved with 25/40 want disabled and nondisabled visitors alike to "play" physically disabled as they crawled up the stairs, obfuscating the portraits of disabled women while remembering the failures of architectural access? The politics of 25/40 enjoining visitors to participate in a temporally distributed and geographically displaced reenactment of the Capitol Crawl, a political action about which many disability activists are ambivalent, baffles. But attending to the dual emphasis on "occupation" helps make sense of what the stairs were up to, as demonstrated by other 25/40 programming that brought the stairs and work into conversation with one another.

A prologue to one of 25/40's performances on the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage included one of the more obvious discussions of physical accessibility and work. Nearly every 25/40 performance at the Kennedy Center began with a prologue in which Betty Siegel, the Center's Director of Accessibility, and a second person (usually a senior-ranking disabled employee at a federal agency) provided audiences a brief orientation to

25/40 and the ADA's legislative achievements. Among those cast to deliver these prologues were disability rights activist Judith Heumann, now employed as Special Advisor for International Disability Rights at the Department of State, and Claudia Gordon, a lawyer who works for the Department of Labor. Both are featured in Google Impact stair portraiture (at the National Portrait Gallery and Gallaudet University, respectively). Without exception, these prologues emphasized the employment opportunities the ADA has opened up for disabled Americans and foregrounded other achievements (such as accessible public transportation) as important insofar as they enabled disabled Americans to travel to and from work.

But the tone changed dramatically when 25/40 pursued a different casting strategy for the prologue of a technology-themed performance.[99] David Carpozzi, Director of Technical and Information Services for the Access Board, was joined by Henry Evans, the CFO of a Silicon Valley startup who acquired multiple disabilities in the early 2000s. Now paralyzed, Evans appeared at 25/40 via a "double telepresence robot" (a small screen that appears atop a mobile "body"), communicating with audiences from his home via an eye-controlled prosthetic speech system. While Carpozzi emphasized the amount of work that remains in order to render technology (especially software interfaces) accessible for disabled users, Evans adopted a more extreme stance about disability, technology, and access. He began his portion of the prologue by declaring that "we have built about all the wheelchair

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[99] "Musical Robots and Cyborgs From Room 100: Georgia Tech's Robotic Musicians and Musical Cyborgs," 25/40 Celebration: Honoring the 25th Anniversary of the ADA and the 40th Anniversary of VSA. Millenium Stage South, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington D.C., 22 July 2015. The performance featured robotic marimba players in collaboration with nondisabled musicians and a disabled drummer "wearing a robotic assistive drumming prosthesis." *25/40 Celebration Event Guide.*

ramps we need."[100] In so doing, he encouraged spectators to consider technology the definitive priority in contemporary discussions of access.[101]

As the introduction continued, it became clear that Evans' proposal to prioritize accessible digital software and hardware was expressly invested in privatizing access, rather than spurring spectators to think of access in more expansive and complicated terms. In particular, Evans emphasized that developing more accessible technology would enable disabled people to work from home. Accessible technology, then, would usher people with disabilities to the labor market through home offices; employers would be relieved of the burden of creating accessible workplaces for disabled employees; and the de-territorialization of corporate structures into networks of flexible home offices – a hallmark of neoliberal capitalism – becomes poised as an alibi to the disability rights movement. Who needs accessible public space if disabled people can work without leaving the comforts/confines of their own homes?[102]

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[100] Earlier in 25/40, actor Matt Frazer performed his one-man show, *Cabinet of Curiosities*, at NMAH and took a couple of cracks at the idea that the U.S. was a physically accessible utopia, with the largely disabled audience laughing in affirmation of his critical observation. Notably, he performed the show on a stage surrounded by brightly colored signage announcing the museum's forthcoming "American Enterprise" exhibit.

[101] Evans' own appearance at 25/40 via the double robotic telepresence suggests the inadequacy of bifurcating access into the physical and the technological. To some extent, we might do well to accept Evans' cue and develop a more robust approach to issues of access, to refuse popular discourses and practices of accommodation that figure the wheelchair user as the paradigmatic disabled subject, and that reduce the problem of accessibility to replacing (or augmenting) stairs with ramps. But given the frequency with which Evans uncritically colludes in ableist framings of his own and other disabled bodies, I'm less inclined than I otherwise might be to offer a generous reading of the sentiments expressed.

[102] Evans emphasized his preference to deliver his prologue via robotic telepresence because of the discomforts of flying as a wheelchair user. Without denying the profound inaccessibility and ableism that makes travel difficult and unpleasant, or the political and affective realities Evans has experienced, I want to highlight that the solutions he proffers put the burden on individual disabled people. Rather than foregrounding the responsibility

Additionally, the catalogue accompanying the Smithsonian branch of 25/40, called Festival ADA, featured a number of advertisements and articles that used various permutations of digital technology, assistive technology, physical access, and work in the name of and also by means of individualizing privatization.[103] Consider an advertisement for "ReWalk Robotics," a company that has developed a "wearable robotic exoskeleton" that allows people with spinal cord injuries to "stand and walk at home, at work, and throughout their communities."[104] The advertisement frames the visually cumbersome ReWalk as both a mimetic marvel that "allows independent, controlled walking while mimicking the natural gait pattern of the legs" and an authentic entrepreneurial brainchild of Dr. Amit Goffer, "an Israeli inventor who became quadriplegic after an ATV accident in 1997. It was through his own personal experiences in utilizing mobility devices for people with spinal cord injury that Dr. Goffer developed the ReWalk."[105] Both textually and visually (one image features a

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of the government to regulate airlines, Evans highlights an individualizing and privatizing vision of access that requires disabled people – many of whom lack the economic and social capital of someone like Evans, a Stanford-trained MBA and startup CFO – to consume expensive technology.

[103] *Festival ADA Catalogue*. Other ill-conceived content within the catalogue includes an advertisement for Goodwill, an organization that has been notorious for exploiting the labor of disabled people by paying them well below the minimum wage. Text adjacent to an image of an older black man seated in a wheelchair announces that "Goodwill has a long history of serving people with disabilities and continues to innovate programs through tools like GoodProspects, Goodwill's online community of career explorers who are learning, sharing ideas, accessing resources, and getting online assistance from virtual career mentors" (34). Articles elsewhere in the catalogue confirm that the inclusion of the Goodwill advertisement was not misbegotten. Eric Tegler's article, "Shifting the Paradigm," describes the fact that people with disabilities work for such subpar wages, as enabled by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as evidence of disabled peoples' superior work ethic: "individuals with disabilities may actually demonstrate greater ambition to work than their mainstream counterparts" (75).

[104] Ibid., 114.

[105] Ibid.

white woman out for a seemingly leisurely stroll in a park), the advertisement represents entrepreneurialism and rehabilitative technology collaborating to grant disabled people access to public life. While ReWalk's admission that disabled people might actually want to leave their homes makes the company somewhat less suspect than Evans' version of techno-utopianism, it still participates in a private (and privatizing) logic by prioritizing walking – rather than mobility – as the ultimate goal. In other words, it reproduces a medical model of disability that treats the individual disabled body as the target of rehabilitative intervention. The ReWalk insists that disabled people accommodate their comportment to the designs of existing physical and affective environments, rather than charging those designing the architectures of public life to think more expansively about the varieties of people who might (want to) inhabit the space they construct.

The Google car represents another permutation of technology, privatization, access, and work. The car is promoted in an article in the museum catalogue and discussed in the technology section of America's Disability Rights Museum on Wheels, which was parked behind NMAH for part of Festival ADA.[106] The panel within the mobile museum describes the Google car in terms of its liberating promise:

> Anyone who can't or doesn't choose to drive can travel as a passenger safely and uneventfully to your desired destination…The application for people with all disabilities and elders will open up and a *[sic]* huge barrier to independence which is transportation.[107]

If ReWalk seeks to act on disabled bodies in such a way that alleviates the imperative to develop accessible architectures, the Google car presents a private alternative to accessible public transportation.

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[106] Ibid., 123.

[107] Google Car Placard, America's Disability Rights Museum on Wheels.

Festival advertisements for the ambulating exoskeleton and the driverless car may have advertised products for two different companies, but the public problems to which they posed private alternatives – architectural barriers (stairs) and transportation – both appeared at 25/40 under the sign of Google. Like the automatic car that bears its namesake, the NMAH stair portraits are the products of Google sponsorship. Architectural access and access to transportation have been treated as representative of disability activism around (physical) accessibility more broadly, but 25/40 extends this by primarily addressing architectural transportation and physical access. The Google-sponsored portraits at NMAH foregrounded the importance of promoting work opportunities for disabled Americans and treating disabled people not as citizens, but as co-workers. A Tom Olin photograph in 25/40's "Photographing the Revolution" exhibit at the Kennedy Center featured a male wheelchair user demanding the right to public transportation by holding a protest sign declaring, "We have the ride to work." Disability activist Judith Heumann (whose portrait is featured on the stairs outside of the National Portrait Gallery) delivered the prologue at 25/40's opening night performance and addressed how accessible public transportation in Washington, D.C. allows her to take the bus to work everyday and the train home at night.

Attending to the discussion of access in another article from the Festival ADA catalogue may help make sense of this triangulation of stairs, work, and transportation; clarify what behavior the NMAH portraits sought to script; and connect this script to 25/40's broader stagings of the disabled entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial legacy of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Toward the end of an article entitled "Wounded Warriors," author J.R. Wilson introduces Sergeant Brian Meyer, a Marine who acquired a number of disabilities fighting in "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan.[108] The article admires Wilson, who upon returning to the United States, "refused to have wheelchair ramps installed in his home."[109] The article frames Meyer's refusal to change his physical environment as the means of his eventual rehabilitation, eventually learning not only to "walk again," but to perform an almost comical list of ruggedly masculine activities, including "rid[ing] his motorcycle, and go[ing] hunting with both rifles and bows and arrows."[110] That the article combines a romance of overcoming disability through individual will and heterosexual masculinity should come as no surprise: prosthetic intervention and rehabilitation still carry the residues of what David Serlin calls the "fiercely heterosexual culture of postwar psychology."[111] But the triangulation of architectural access, work, and privatization that densely populated the disability imaginary of 25/40 appears in this narrative not only as a tired inspirational story of a resiliently willful subject who supplements and even transforms his disability into ability by means of excessive heterosexual masculinity, but, also as a description of someone who Michel Foucault might call an entrepreneur of the self. Remember that for Foucault, the entrepreneur of himself is *homo economicus* under neoliberalism. No longer a "partner of exchange," economic man is now "being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for

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[108] J.R. Wilson, "Wounded Warriors." *Festival ADA Catalogue*. 132-41.

[109] Ibid., 141.

[110] Ibid.

[111] David Serlin, "Engineering Masculinity: Veterans and Prosthetics after World War Two," *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*. Eds. Katherine Ott, David Serlin, and Stephen Mihm (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 56.

himself the source of [his] earnings."[112] But this change in the character of economic man exceeds the economic sphere. Along with this new economic man, Foucault's take on neoliberalism features enterprise becoming generalized across all spheres of social life, with non-economic activity increasingly understood in economic terms, and *homo economicus* provides a "grid of intelligibility for such behavior."[113]

25/40 proffered disability entrepreneurship as a paradigm for disability history, as a mode of disability performance, and as an index of the success of the ADA's real and symbolic legislative achievements. But it did so without showcasing "successful" disabled entrepreneurs, or advertising entrepreneurial opportunities for disabled Americans (outside of its implicit recognition of solo performance as a viable, if compulsory, entrepreneurial mode for disabled artists). Instead, it pursued this entrepreneurial paradigm by resignifying the ADA's failures to successfully protect disabled Americans from employment discrimination as not evidence of failure at all, but as evidence of a different kind of success: the impetus for expanding the reach of neoliberal *homo economicus* to disabled Americans, the prompt for recreating the disabled subject who is unable to sell her own labor as the "differently-abled" entrepreneur of the self. This entrepreneurial paradigm was committed to both a rewriting of disability history and to ongoing processes of disability subject formation, processes it achieved through a broad range of performance practices ranging from popular entertainment forms like stand-up comedy to quotidian processes of embodied behavior, in the case of the Google stair portraiture and their accompanying performances. But the ambiguity regarding what constitutes those performances, performances complicit in the dubious project of reenacting what is already a contested political action within disability

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[112] Foucault, 226.

[113] Ibid., 243.

history, also opens up the possibility of exposing the limits of this unwavering confidence in the disabled entrepreneur and in rethinking the politics of the Capitol Crawl itself.

In light of the fact that businesses have staunchly refused to implement ADA-mandated accommodations on account of "undue hardship" (cost), might we think of the Capitol Crawl itself as disability activists protesting against the imperative to be in and of themselves their own capital, their own producers, their own earnings? How does thinking of the Capitol Crawl as a protest against the imperative to entrepreneurialize the self affect how we imagine those stair portraits script human behavior? Earlier I imagined several possibilities of how NMAH visitors might have responded to the prompt to "occupy our front steps" by climbing, crawling, or refusing to do so. The entrepreneur of the self insists that we imagine another series of actions the stairs might prompt: a woman with a spinal cord injury leaving her Dupont Circle hotel, hailing an employee-less Google cab, being deposited at the intersection of 14th Street and Constitution Avenue in her ReWalk exoskeleton, and walking up the stairs, only to realize twenty stairs later that she has arrived nowhere: all by herself.

CONCLUSION

DISEMPLOYMENT, REVISITED

The late twentieth and early twenty-first century U.S. witnessed profound transformations within (and between) the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. This transformative epoch overlaps with dominant periodizations of neoliberalism in the United States and elsewhere. Key developments within this period include the recalibration of citizenship, the reorganization and practice of work, and a number of activist challenges to the hegemony of white, middle-class, able-bodied heterosexuality from racial justice, feminist, gay liberation, and disability movements. Transformations in the racial and gender (and, this dissertation argues, ability) composition of the U.S. American workforce since the second World War unfolded in tandem with the attenuation of the most robust (if still partial and uneven) welfare state the U.S. had (and as of this writing, *has*) ever known. These developments helped usher forth a new conception of national belonging in which citizenship was now based upon one's status as a worker. We might notice this shift not only in social policy, but also in the centrality of employment nondiscrimination provisions within various forms of minoritarian political struggle.

But as citizens became workers and workers became citizens, the content and meaning of work itself was undergoing transformations. Processes of de-industrialization relocated much of material commodity production for Euro-American consumers to the Global South, and new forms of labor – variously theorized as affective, immaterial, and communicative – became paramount. Sometimes independently from and sometimes in tandem with material commodities, appeals to experiences, services, information, and social relationships came to dominate the commodity sphere. This ascendence of affective (among other forms of purportedly non-material) forms of labor was not new, of course. Rather, it represented an expanding and intensified commercialization of gendered and racialized forms of reproductive labor and the work of making and remaking the wage relation that are endemic to capitalism. Notably, scholars both outside and inside of the fields of theatre and performance studies have turned to figure of the actor – the worker who reproduces affect for a wage – both as a paradigmatic affective laborer within the contemporary neoliberal political economic landscape and to challenge the purported newness of these forms of work.

"Performing Disemployment" demonstrates the importance of examining this series of developments regarding work, performance, and citizenship with respect to coterminous but often overlooked political movements in U.S. American history: the disability rights and disability justice movements. A series of legislative victories combined with government inertia to help galvanize these movements in the 1970s, as Americans with a range of physical, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities began claiming "disability" as a political and cultural identity and demanding access to and the ability to participate within the political, social, and cultural life of the nation. In particular, I address what might at first seem to be a rather curious development: a proliferation of government initiatives, activist instiutions, and individual artists who mobilize theatre and performance as modes of labor to usher disabled Americans into the workforce. "Performing Disemployment" attends to this flourishing of activity around disability, theatre, and work in the 1970s and its aftermath over the next half century, moving from the years leading up to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act to a festival celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. In so doing, it demonstrates how theatre and performance practices emerged as the critical nexus between disability politics and the politics of work in the late twentieth and twenty-first century.

Foregrounding theatre and performance in this history proves significant for a number of reasons. Certainly, it demonstrates that transformations in the relationship between art and work, and between disability and work, were mutually constitutive. That is to say: the processes of reconfiguring the organization and practice of work in the United States were inseperable from efforts that targeted a new population—disabled Americans. The disabled, long understood to be incapable of work, now became not only employable, but in many cases they were reimagined as ideal workers. Even more importantly, attending to this previously unrealized geneaology of disability performance and work sheds new light on just how central a concern with the employability of disabled Americans (even if, alas, not always their *employment*) has been within disability politics and activism since the 1970s. Not only has the centrality of work escaped the received historiography of disability in the U.S., but on the occasion that historians, critics, and activists draw our attention to the subject of work, they tend to treat it as an unqualified good, as the horizon of disability politics and activism. The geneaology of disability performance traced in this dissertation, then, highlights the ubiquity of work within disability politics and activism in part to undo it. Imagining and enacting more just futures, as much for disabled Americans as for anyone else, requires first unearthing the limits of contemporary forms of political activism.

A commitment to imagining and acting otherwise is another reason that it is imperative to attend to theatre and performance practices in the history of disability and work. At the same time that activists, policymakers, and individual artists turned to theatre and performance to create work opportunities and job training for disabled Americans, queer and feminist artists (sometimes the very same ones collaborating with policymakers) used theatre and performance to contest work as the prevailing goal of disability politics. I appropriate the term "disemployment," then, to describe the peculiar geneaology of theatre and performance practices that are simultaneously mobilized for what otherwise might seem contradictory political projects: putting disabled Americans to work and contesting the thrall to compulsory labor within disability policy and activism, as well as within citizenship more broadly. Looking across experimental theatre, epistolary performance, activist ephemera, acting manuals, talkbacks, and quotidian enactments, "Performing Disemployment" foregrounds how attention not only to theatre and performance, but to the history of disability, helps us to imagine and realize a more just world in which surviving, thriving, and belonging are no longer contingent upon one's productive capacities.

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