DISABILITY THEATRE MANIFESTO

By Emily Gray

FOREWORD

- Situate myself as an ally
- Purpose of this work is not to look for 'best' practices, but rather 'better' practices
- Two perspectives in disability theater academia:
 - Benefits and idealistic thinking in purple
 - Drawbacks and realistic thinking in red

CONSIDERATION OF INACCESSIBILITY OF MAINSTREAM THEATRE

- Theatre is oriented toward normates:
 - Normate spaces
 - Normate time
 - Normate languages

DECONSTRUCTING 'DISABLED'

Drawbacks:

- The word 'disabled' creates otherness
- Biological metaphors attached to binary structure
 - Women viewed as 'less rational'
 - Black people viewed as more 'animal-like'
 - Disabled people aligned with disease, poverty, degeneracy, tragedy, loss and victimhood
- Able-bodied people thinking disabled people want to be 'normal'
 - Undermines positive experiences of disability culture

DECONSTRUCTING 'DISABLED'

Benefits:

- Claiming disability means access to accommodations (pain killers, disabled parking plates, etc)
- Reclaiming the word
 - Source of communality and cohesion in the face of oppression

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF WHAT DISABILITY THEATRE ONCE WAS

- 'Freak Shows'
 - Managers had more rights to the bodies of performers than the performers did themselves
 - Pitchmen enticing in with exaggerations of strangeness
 - Hyperbolizing environments
 - Memorabilia
 - Disabled people performing mundane tasks

WHAT IS DISABILITY THEATRE NOW?

- Artists who feel a strong connection between their disability and their art who see themselves as part of the disability movement
- Moving from medical model to social model
- Different approaches:
 - Radical vs subtle
 - Seeking charitable status vs rejecting charitable status
 - Exclusively disabled vs mixed ability groups

WHO CAN PLAY WHAT ROLE?

- Spectrum of belief over who can play what role
- Is problematic representation better than no representation at all?
 - Push for able-bodied actors to refuse disabled roles
 - Would that mean that the roles would just disappear?
 - Having a hard time finding disabled talent is no excuse
 - Disabled bodies onstage is necessary so that they become less of a rarity – leads to recognizing humanity

DISCLOSURES

- “What happened to you?”
- Choosing to answer question
 - Opportunity of self-definition
 - Opportunity to educate on ableism
 - Pandering to able-bodied audience?
- Choosing not to answer
 - Power in refusing to explain – one’s body does not require explanation
- Non-visibly disabled disclosures
 - If they do not disclose, a part of the disabled community is not represented
 - Why should they have to disclose?

WHY AREN'T MORE DISABLED PEOPLE GOING INTO THE ARTS?

- Barriers to full course loads
- STEM jobs more appealing
- Actor training dissuading students
 - Neutral body
 - Emotional body

CALLS TO ACTION

- For those employed by the university:
 - Consider what more you could be doing!
 - Visit Disability Services!
 - Make a recruitment plan for disabled students!
 - You have a lot of power – use it!

CALLS TO ACTION

- For everyone:
 - Go and support disability theatre!

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Most importantly...

HOLD YOURSELVES AND OTHERS RESPONSIBLE!

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**USE THE INFORMATION PRESENTED TODAY AND LET IT INFLUENCE
YOUR FUTURE ACTIONS!**

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