

## *Trisomic Stages: Theater Hora and Jerome Bel's Genetically Modified Theater*

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**Abstract:** *Disabled Theater* (2012) is choreographer Jérôme Bel's performance-based investigation into "how theater is modified when it is done by actors with a learning disability and what theater does to actors with a learning disability" (Bel) By proliferating the codes of theatricality *Disabled Theater* succeeds in intertwining critical reflection and intensive affect. Audiences become uncomfortably aware of how the seemingly mimetic failure of the performers and their child-like vulnerability produce the quality of "presence" that is currently fetishized in live performance. Alongside Bel and Theater Hora, this paper asks whether *Disabled Theater's* production of a trisomic stage and its capacity as a critical affect mechanism might expand theater's disciplinary and disciplining genetic composition in order to homeopathically relieve the art form of its complicity in the project of social normalization.

**Keywords:** Disabled Theater, seduction, Bel, spectator

*I define the Neutral as that which outplays [d  jouer] the paradigm,  
or rather what I call Neutral, everything that baffles the paradigm.*

*For I am not trying to define a word; I am trying to name a thing:*

*I gather under a name, which here is the Neutral.*

Roland Barthes (2005:6)

During rehearsals, a term that theater scholar Natalie Crohn Schmidt reminds us literally means to "reharrow, [to] go over old ground," (78) choreographer Jerome Bel asked the actors appearing in what eventually became *Disabled Theater* to complete six tasks: stand in the front of the stage without speaking for one minute; say your name, age and profession; name your handicap; create a dance solo and perform it; tell what you think about this performance bow.

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Bel was invited by dramaturge Marcel Bugiel to collaborate with Theater Hora, a Zurich-based theater company composed of professional actors who self-define as cognitively impaired, and perform in Swiss-German. Bel's standard interview reply to the question of why he agreed to collaborate with Theater Hora, is an answer that he rehearses at every press event where *Disabled Theater* is performed. He tells the story of how he was reluctant to engage with Theater Hora and with the theme of "mental disabilities." In the classic Aristotelian structure of reversal and recognition, Bel then tells of his compulsion to collaborate because he, as the spectator, was so affectively overcome upon viewing video documentation of Theater Hora's previous work. That reiterated commentary, circulated worldwide via the internet, functions as the spectator's periperformative introduction to *Disabled Theater*, a staged meta-reflection on the mechanics of how theater produces affective attachments via spectatorship, and the personal, social, and political ramifications of feeling these entanglements. Bel's answer privileges how he was moved and how that affection precipitated an action—it led to his decision to spend time – as he says, "becoming tied up" – in presence of the company even though he had no experience or skills in working with neurodivergent actors. *Disabled Theater* is Bel's effort to cognitively master what moved him.

**Jérôme Bel:** I [Bel] didn't know anything about mentally disabled people. I knew it [the process of creation] would be very difficult because of political correctness. I would be tied up; it would be very slippery as I have no expertise on this issue. A few days later, I watched the DVDs, and I was speechless. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Their [the actors in Theater Hora] ways to be onstage were very surprising and overwhelming. I wrote them that as I was coming to perform in Zurich in three months, I would be interested to meet the actors for three hours. After those three hours, I asked for five days. And after those five days, I said I would like to make a piece with them.

**Time Out New York:** Have you worked with learning-disabled performers before?

**Jérôme Bel:** Never.

**Time Out New York:** Could you describe what your ideas were for this piece?

**Jérôme Bel:** I didn't have any idea at all. I knew I was there because of this emotion I had watching the DVDs. I wanted to know why I had been so deeply moved, I was crying watching them perform. I couldn't explain this emotion to myself, so I needed to work with them to try to understand this totally unexpected reaction. (2014)

The event of *Disabled Theater's* conception is coded differently however for Bugiel, Theater Hora's dramaturge, who publicly represents the company. Bugiel's narrative begins with his exposure to Bel's repertoire and Theater Hora's desire to work with the avant-garde performance maker – Bugiel's is an outreach narrative that precedes theatrical collaboration. One could hypothesize that Theater Hora might have desired to be associated with the avant-garde cultural capital Bel brings to the party, or feels an affinity with his aesthetic. But that would be mere speculation, for Theater Hora's perspective has not circulated like Bel's does. The spectator does not hear it beforehand; the company did not participate in shaping the periperformative narrative on the public stage that Bel was afforded at various performance venues. Already fractured into dissynchronous narratives that are unequally valued and circulated, obstacles that disability studies analysis takes up as critique,<sup>1</sup> biosocial discourse also tells us that dissynchronicity like the operation of these unaligned narratives, when intensively experienced in an individual, is an indicator of mental illness.<sup>2</sup>

To his credit, Bel foregrounds dissynchronicity in the very dramaturgy of *Disabled Theater* and critically refracts it through a biosocial lens. Using his encounter with the actors of Theater Hora as the paradigm, Bel reharrows how dissynchronicity is coded into the apparatus of theater and refigured as

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, see David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. University of Michigan Press, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Dissynchronicity is a term in medical discourse that is identified as a possible symptom of mental illness. What is pertinent to this argument is that in rendering of dissynchronicity in the discourse of human biosociality, the standard literature informs us that "people experience uneasiness or anxiety when the analogic and digital readout of their information coding processes, that is their non-verbal and verbal communication patterns are out of synchrony with those around them. This dissynchronicity may lead to a confusion in the definition of relationships and a lack of predictability in the information exchange system. But, as emphasized Spradlin in *Human Biosociology*, "all information coding systems, ranging from complex social interactions to equally complex inter- and intracellular activity, are continually changing data. The data move from one mode of coding to another, with continuous feedback loops.

[http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/468/chp%253A10.1007%252F978-1-4612-6148-3\\_10.pdf?auth66=1414927476\\_75d680d04517c3c42d9b76e90fb71dad&ext=.pdf](http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/468/chp%253A10.1007%252F978-1-4612-6148-3_10.pdf?auth66=1414927476_75d680d04517c3c42d9b76e90fb71dad&ext=.pdf)

neutral rather than a social pathology. As a personally felt disjuncture of temporality, dissynchronicity instantiates the leap to a pathologizing diagnoses. But in taking it up theatrically to demonstrate it as a structure, it is foregrounded as the “problem” that Bel understands that he will be entangled.

Following Roland Barthes meditations on *The Neutral*, I will offer an analysis of *Disabled Theater* as an anecdote, antidote, bafflement and feedback loop – a performed and performance-based essay – that detourns dissynchronicity and isomorphism. Rather than the viewer finding those qualities through the performer as embodying the disabled subject, the location of the drama shifts. What is enacted on stage instead compels, intensifies, and stages all the processes that consolidate affect into knowledge formation. What happens on stage prompts the spectator to become conscious of the speed, temporality and other mechanism of theater that direct the spectator to judge and evaluate – in essence produce “the problem” that Bel references. Affect is an internal bodied movement that is also a re-harrowing. It happens first for Bel and then in the body of the audience as his proxy.

Because little happens in *Disabled Theater*. Instead the primary theatrical event happens in the mind of the cerebral spectator. *Disabled Theater* transforms the audience member into the “cerebral subject” of the play, a neurocultural term attributed to activist Judy Singer that points to an event – the nexus of “self, sociocultural interaction and behavior” (Ortega 426). Here it is the bodied experience of feeling how judgments and assumptions about the onstage performers proliferate and oscillate, speeding forward to discredited histories and integrating themselves into the present. In sites other than the theater, persistent dissynchronous felt thoughts like what happens to the spectator when watching *Disabled Theater* would be actionable and of great concern. The spectator understands that. So too would thoughts that dizzily individuate, aggregate, and then individuate once again like the fast forwarding the repetitions of a soloist emerging from the chorus and returning to the group and becoming indistinct.

But theater is malleable in its capacities to work with and against itself as Bel demonstrates, for it is lauded as an apparatus that can mobilize thought’s dynamics, and in different mixtures and quantities. The skill that Bel brings to it is that his project is to think about recoding to destabilize the pathologizing subjectivization and social devaluation. Bel, Bugiel and the actors appearing in *Disabled Theater* collaborate to refigure theatrical conventions so that they entangle and baffle the spectator in the knottiness of her or his own thoughts. In using the theater to cognitively overload the spectator to the point of paralysis, Bel also makes an opening for the subjects of the dispositif or the theatrical

apparatus that makes disability a habitus to shift their position within it. Some performers make their way to its margins either voluntarily; others are moved out forcibly. Others, more or less like Bel (more) and Bugiel (less), who ally artistically ally themselves might change coordinates. The work offers modalities of theater that conceive of an aperture in which to imagine the theatrical equivalent of the aphoristic writing in Giorgio Agamben's coming community – where the formal techniques can muddle subjectivization so that valuation and classification are drained of their political utility.

*Disabled Theater* takes up cognition as its subject. What happens on stage with actors who labor under the broad category of cognitive disability compels the audience members, like Bel before them, to become conscious of the speed and variability of our own mental processes. The production places neural self-awareness on an intimate and personal stage. It is structured to create a reaction in each spectator where her thoughts become spectacular and singular to the thinker. But the experience happens communally and synchronously, to each among others. Reversing the material stage as the location of action and making it immaterial, while and affective heightening temporal consciousness in each spectator's mind before it coheres into a discursive feeling, baffles any common interpretation or easy reduction of the work. The force generated by becoming conscious that this meta-reflection is all taking place in one's mind, enervates rather than mobilizes. The work creates a paralytic affect state where the energy of the audience members is directed to conscious contemplation of the interdependence of culture and cognition. What the spectator "sees" and "perceives" in her own mind is how theater assists biology and genetics by showing performing bodies that instantiate the conventions and behaviors the sciences have identified.

*Disabled Theater* genetically modifies the theatrical freak show by sidestepping the normative carnivalesque and the avant-garde genres through which historically it is most often cast, constructed and critiqued. Quite startlingly instead, *Disabled Theater* uncannily replicates the ontological, aesthetic and economic theatrical model of the backstage Broadway musical *A Chorus Line*, a work that isomorphically reiterates and proliferates theatrical coding. Bel's formal aesthetic interventions act to confound – not invert – the bright lines of genre paradigms. The redirection makes a claim for a wider contemplation of theater's unmarked normativity as a freak show and as technology that assists biological and genetic discourses in becoming coherent merely through the everyday display of selecting, grouping and individuating social subjects.

While theater becomes the exemplary mechanism to naturalize the social effects of disciplinary discourses, Bel is not content to merely reiterate that Foucauldian critique or settle for Judith Butler's assessment that the effects of performativity on stage do not engender the same social impact. Attentive to Butler, the collaboration between Bel and Theater Hora undoes code with more code – highlighting the importance of shifting quantities. This strategy alters what singular or foregrounded codes compose. Bel adds in theatrical codes in homeopathic doses to alter historical dramaturgical structures. During the performance, the audience becomes destabilized – they experience a qualitative change in themselves which occurs when different applications and quantities of genetic modification are performed to theatrical conventions that usually set to default to a primary action—that of reducing singularities to categorizable subjects when bodies appear on the stage.

How does code disable code by proliferation? In *Disabled Theater*, Bel takes up the actors of Theater Hora because they are overdetermined. Over determination depends on coding quantities, proliferation and terminology muddles. The actors' association with Theater Hora already classifies them as subjects of and foregrounded through neurodivergence; in the show the performers are made to speak of their materiality through the conventions of confession, analysis, and audition. Some, but not all, speak of their genetics, and self diagnose. All these conventions are theatrical conventions – coding mechanisms that classify, group and reduce subjects. Actors and translators are made to tell and exemplify how distinctive stage identities are embodied and where they are located under the sign of divergence. They reiterate how varying diagnoses cohere through past discredited observational measurements (like phrenology or phenotype) and that progress in science and medicine depends on other still validated measurements such as kinesthetic and specular evaluation. Without comment or judgment, *Disabled Theater* calls upon the proliferation of pathologizing historical and contemporary diagnostic discourses still in play to show that while conventions of valuation may change over time, demonstrating the value of valuation that is theater's genetics.

But when code is unspooled on the stage, activating a proliferation of both discredited and validated, their quantity and adjacency baffles any one's singular programming. Proliferating cognitive frameworks shift where stage action locates itself, concomitantly unspooling in the mind of spectator. And by happening all at once, valid and invalid bleed into each other. That

indistinction veers toward the pathological; allowing synchronous thoughts to appear as adjacent. The outwards spatialization and flattening also unspools the logic of their irrationality. The spectator feels how the mechanics theatrical organization calls upon appearances, sorts and individuates in order to confer normative value. *Disabled Theater* invalidates that paradigm – at least somewhat – for it shows and invests in codes that capaciously include paradoxes and aphorism; showing how theater is *not yet fully* determined or determining of truth and still produces it. The production also suggests that as codes become transparent, adding others can disarm them. From this formal operation, *Disabled Theater* suggests how there may be a possibility of refiguring neurodiverse biosociality. Acting as a pedagogical coding machine, *Disabled Theater* demonstrates some of the operations that can be done on, with and beside the theater – within singular performances an/or periperformatively – and that these operations also produce different framings and outcomes that baffle the unidirectional choreography of singular focus and individuation that sends spectatorial thought hurtling toward diagnosis and prescription.

The effects of these code proliferations can alter the circumstances for the performers – but differently than the spectator. The exercises that shift and affectively overwhelm the audience can also function as a diversionary tactic for the overdetermined performing subject to revise modes of embodiment and self-presentation. *Disabled Theater* foregrounds a score over a fixed script, to accommodate for improvisatory isomorphic shifts between being and performing. Although the show is bounded, who retains the authority that determines those boundaries seems to be a constant negotiation. I noticed that the performance makes no physical disciplinary requirements of the performers like the commercial theater, which sets and freezes the actions and the visual appearance of bodies performing those actions.

An observation: Over the first year's run of the show, original *Disabled Theater* cast member Miranda Hossle appears to have lost half of her body weight between performances in Kassel Germany in 2012 and when I saw her perform in Milan in 2013. I interpreted those changes in embodiment as profound, and connected them to how she authored and altered her projected stage image. In the fourth action of the show, when Hossle is called upon to dance the Orientalist solo she choreographed for herself, using a shawl as a prop, her work in Kassel uncannily reminiscent of the dances American choreographer Ruth St. Denis's created for herself after seeing the image of the Egyptian goddess Isis on a poster of a Turkish cigarette ad. Dance critic

Deborah Jowitt explains this for St. Denis as a “becoming an icon of her imagined other self” (130). Hossle’s dance – the first of the seven in the fourth sequence – destabilizes the canard that an individual’s true singularity – or presence – can be accessed through kinesthetic expression. But movement can also be read as the means toward an aspirational embodiment. Hossle does not disclose whether her reiteration of a colonial fantasy is a conscious comment on Orientalism or on femininity – and as an audience member, my default mode of cognition is to question her reflexive capacity merely because I am seeing the work in the context of *Disabled Theater*. I have never applied the same mode of questioning to queer avant-garde performer Jack Smith whose own “presence” in his Orientalist kinesthetic embodiment was drawn from Maria Montez’s B movies, for unconsciously I grant Smith “normative” cognitive function.

But while I am wrapped up in my own reactions, other things happen that most audience members would not seek out. In the Kassel performances, I linked the amateurish mimicry in Hossle’s dance performed at twice her later weight to her neurological capacity. In Milan, where I first saw Hossle in person, before the show began, I was unclear as to whether she was even an actor in the company. I could not read any visible presentation of neurodivergence, and her dance, I experienced that that performance like dance karaoke – more like imitation Shakira derived from repeated Youtube viewing than St. Dennis. My linkages speak only to my own projections and systems of aesthetic valuation – many of which I find somewhat shameful and which this production forces me to reflect upon. Bel later told me that Hossle’s effort to lose weight was deliberate and part of her strategy to separate herself from the company. In the time between the first performance and the last, I don’t know if Hossle’s self-diagnosed “handicap” has changed – it didn’t when she said it in the third action of the show, but because of my repeated viewing over the run, I was privileged to watch a cognitive process occur, where being on stage and touring the world with the company allowed Hossle to determine how to become normatively indistinguishable and extract herself from the paradigm she performed – from being primarily valued for her capacity to express the over determinedness of “disabled” or “handicapped.” Not everyone has the luxury to become indeterminate by means of camouflage because of the similarity of observable external features and bodied movements that have been linked to genetic coding. But neither is that flexibility is not afforded most performers in the commercial theater either who are cast by “type.”



So many codes cannot be neutralized quite as easily through the collaboration's modifications—that is the limit of this production – not just to refigure the social but in the practices of theater. But the labor speaks to the becoming more conscious of theater's varieties of possibility. By concentrating on the set of conventions and practices of theater as a *dispositif*. I was able to fashion a “non-normative” spectatorial engagement with this piece. I slowed down my rush to judgment and saw the production three times over the course of a year and a half. What I write here cycles through the observations I accumulated by seeing *Disabled Theater* as a show that “runs” over the course of time and what is performed in the first evening is reiterated in two different locations, in first in Milan and later Singapore. I also interviewed Bel at the Frieze Art Fair in London in 2013, and read several recent scholarly analyses of the work. I admit right off, from the moment I heard about the production, I was captivated. And I continue to think and write from that position. In Milan, before I saw the show, I spent several hours in the café engaged in a chance meeting with the actors and felt entirely welcomed – enchanted by the company. That feeling lingers and it feels rueful and sweet.

In the year between my first viewing of the show in Milan and my second and third in Singapore, Hossle and Lorraine Meier, the latter whose wild-eyed and angry speech about her handicap was probably the most singular shocking moment in the show every time it was performed, have disappeared from the production. While Hossle left of her own volition as her body thinned and became more aligned with normative standards of beauty, I don't know what happened to Meier. Meier was one of the older members of the cast. Onstage, she identified herself as in her forties, and presented as a difficult and tendentious stage personality. In Milan, when asked to say her handicap, Meier was the only one that made me flinch. As she stepped up to the microphone, she uttered, “mongoloid... I am a fucking mongol, or sometimes not... It hurts me.”

The complex racialized effects of that perjorative term were palpable; the utterance did not offer the audience some intellectual breathing room. Instead the speech act interpellates an observation—my knee-jerk response was to stare at Meier's facial features. She masterfully directed the audience to participate in the *dispositif* which exposes itself in this encounter. The phenotypological kind of staring Meier commanded a stream of mental associations for me – in essence it made me soliloquize, and I became the performer in my mind. But I was also aware of my impulse control and that I repressed speaking my thoughts aloud. I thought about how that mode of

looking has been the source of great historical injury. I thought about how looking back at Meier made me feel awful – and even worse now as I write and time passes. Rationalizations still sped through my brain to quell the waves of anxiety. But I also ask myself about my desire for Maier to repress her act, and conclude that my wish for her to mask her enacted response stems from my keen absorption and compliance with my own normative theatrical comportment. Meier was so far afield from how I identify or value her act as mimetic. What she did broke the rules of the stage that allowed audiences to comfortably engage with the action without enduring real consequences.

Meier's reply most likely did pain me more it did her at that moment, for Meier was felicitously doing her job, which was to replay herself in her first encounter with Bel. Miranda Hossle tells us as much in the fifth operation of the Disabled Theater scenario where Bel asks the actors to tell what they think of the play. Hossle said her job as an actor was to play herself. But I am sure Meier would not get cast if she was only an actor. Bel needed a double threat (in the Broadway musical a double threat is a dancer who could sing, a triple threat which often made one an individual star is a person who could "do it all" – sing, dance and act. Following this logic, all Theater Hora actors are triple threats. The other collaborators like Bel and Bugiel are not.). The double threat (which can be taken as a social threat or challenge to the social norm) of this particular production called for all performers to be legible as specific genetic material *and* to act. This was indeed threatening; my discomfort persisted, as I struggled to remain present to the multiple sensations, which included nagging doubt and the unquantifiable feeling that Meier was at least able to make a living as a professional actor – not just because of neurodivergence but because she looked her age, and female actors this old in the commercial theater are not afforded longevity unless they are virtuosic. I did not speak my internal thoughts aloud then. I do so now in this scholarly paper, the arguably proper venue to release these concerns and still appear "normal."

Observation. When I went back to see the show a year later in Singapore, Meier and Hossle been replaced with two much younger and sweeter looking performers, Fabienne Villiger and Remo Zarentonello. Villiger and Zarentonello both identify their handicap as Down's Syndrome. Neurodivergence doesn't seem to be a limit to what normalizes this work as much as age and specular gender conformity. And, although the structure of the work does not compel the new performers to repeat the words and acts

of the older departed performers, they retain and lim the initial performers' styles and attitudes. But in this new iteration, the wild improvisatory quality of Hossle's disdain and boredom and Meier's anger are tempered. Villiger and Zarentonello fit almost too easily into the performance style that has already consolidated itself and become normalized – so much so that the third new addition, an older actor, Nikolai Gralak in the “tell what you think of this piece scene” offers a masterful deconstruction of the work that is far better than the piece of writing you are reading right now. The adapted performance seems to have settled with the new coding of Villiger, Zarentonello and Gralak, detouring the work back to a now comprehensible theatrical model. The odder racial and colonial traces in dances and choices of music in the dance solos are evacuated – Zarentonello virtuosically dances a Cossak number that looks like the break out solo after a few drinks at a wedding, and Villenger's crowd-pleaser echoes Miley Cyrus's coming of age rebelliousness in her performed boxstep to the Abba hit, “Money, Money, Money.” Villinger chose Abba as did Meier in her dance solo choreographed to “Dancing Queen.” But while Villenger dances in a restrained fashion and her capitalist critique is an easy crowdpleaser, Meier intensified the spectators's uneasy pleasure of enjoying her unrestrained and ecstatic dance because she complexly coded disorder and bafflement into the trajectory of her stage persona and again in her choreography.

Substituting Zarentonello and Villinger for Hossle and Meier, drained the affective charge of the work that seems to have been encoded in the original rehearsal. The rehearsal was a process which Bel conceived as an encounter – for him it was a – which in reflection cannot merely be a rehearsal for it seems, from what the show has lost, that the initial even was one where everyone struggled with Agamben's “whatever singularity” of all who were adjacent to one another in that room, during that period. But Hossle's transformation in plain sight over the course of the run indicated that this was not her objective nor what she most valued – for Hossle this work became a mechanism through which she could become physically indistinguishable outside of the theater and performatively illegible.

This goal sits uncomfortably on the spectrum of disabilities culture, for a genetically modified theater offers the opportunity to become less recognizable in relation to prior subjectivisation. As the spectator's cognitive circuits are scrambled – or at least and consciously felt as such – and simultaneously heightened as kinesthetically the body becomes less mobile – the spectator (and the critic's) preoccupation with neurological introspection and concomitant

paralysis provides an obscured and potential opening for the performers. What performers do with those opportunities may not be considered either normatively liberating or progressive. But because the performance directs the spectator to contemplate the proliferating codes without hierarchical value in a concentrated metaflexive rush that directs the spectator to a present experience of how past cultural influences are neurologically embedded – some performers take advantage of that arrest to performatively obscure and un-differentiate themselves and become less recognizably “divergent”. Feminist scholar Gayle Rubin mined this territory to propose the term “benign variation” as a way to radically revalue stigmatized acts and the bodies who perform them.<sup>3</sup> This radical notion seems necessary and unachievable. I what I am instead arguing here is that the genetic modifications of the theater by *Disabled Theater* provide for fugitive strategies of camouflage and flight because of the obscuring expressions associated with overdetermination. There is a choice to risk engaging these strategies like Hossle did, or submit to their lure like Maier. And both become cautionary anecdotes that demonstrate some values, practices and risks of indistinction and of the logic of capture.

Observation. *Disabled Theater* is organized as a series of anecdotes, much like the musical theater production it most resembles, the original 1975 Broadway production of *A Chorus Line*. The anecdote is a form, according to Roland Barthes, that relates something that is “impossible to put better” – in this performance it is also a confessional (36). And, what baffles us most in an age where irony still is the default of the avant-garde in the theater, is that the show is sweet. Sweetness, Barthes writes in *The Neutral*, is a form of tact. *Disabled Theater* seeks out a form of nonviolent refusals of reductive and actionable critique and instead grapples with neutralizing codes of performance in order to expose a twinkle (Barthes’ term) of singularity. Tact’s hallmark is

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<sup>3</sup> Feminist scholar Gayle Rubin, in her 1993 article, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of a Politics of Sexuality,” argued for political necessity of reordering the hierarchical system of sexual value as the possibility of political and social change where specific behaviors are linked to social status through “an excess of significance.” The radical solution that Rubin envisions is a pluralistic “benign spectrum” of consensual acts in which all are allowed to “exhibit the full range of human experience” and none are “still viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of affection, love, free choice or transcendence.” Following Rubin’s logic, appears that Bel with Theater Hora is experimenting with the ways in which to excavate all the impediments to Rubin’s vision of a benign spectrum through his constant reharrowing of the apparatus of the theatrical chorus line and the individuation of the soloist (which marks the emergence of Western theater from the Dionysian dithyramb) to envision a trisomic stage as the means to its production.

inventiveness and particularity toward the intersubjective encounter. Barthes writes, "each time in my pleasure, or my desire, or my distress, the others discourse (often well-meaning, innocent) reduces me to a case that fits an all purpose explanation or classification in the most normal way, I feel there is a breach of the principle of tact" (36). *Disabled Theater* becomes a mechanism that demonstrates and navigates the expressive apparatuses of tact's breach as well as how it might be modeled – while it paradoxically tangles with the slipperiness of how those discursive and nondiscursive operations are naturalized as and in theater's genetic codes. What confuses me still is whether, thinking with *Disabled Theater*, one can modify theater enough to remedy it homeopathically.

The slipperiness of this endeavor, as Bel notes, comes an avant-garde wariness or refusal – to become captive to something. In the recent history, the "normative" aesthetics of theater veered far closer to what Brecht outlined (but evacuated of his politics) which dovetail with a neoliberal doctrine that espouses and values the autonomy of parts, shows that can be excised from their context or even their original medium, and an alienated stance between the creators to the work. A first or any superficial glance at *Disabled Theater* can easily find the locus of objectionable content as Petra Kuppers does in her recent TDR article, "Outsider Histories, Insider Artists, Cross-Cultural Ensembles: Visiting with Disability Presences in Contemporary Art Environments" (2014). But Kuppers begins the article by an elision, to which the publication lends scholarly validity, that she has not experienced the work firsthand.

Alienated from the scene of the theatrical event, Kuppers takes up the privilege of the post-modern scholar, grounding her decision to abjure seeing the work by citing a proxy contact, Nadja Sayej who (by my interpretation of Kupper's quote), did not so much as dismiss the *Disabled Theater*, but instead carefully recorded how she and the other audience members were baffled, disturbed and angered by the experience. But Kuppers uses the description to validate her methodology, checking Savej's narrative against other un-cited web accounts. For the time she spends on that investigation Kuppers could have attended the live show but instead concluded from that internet research that the production lacked "anything that is informed by disability culture values, by a questioning of medical diagnoses, or by an interest in disabled people as more than just the representatives of disability" (32).

I am not chastising Kuppers for her choice. In her footnote she clarifies that her earlier work has addressed the "'victim art' routine extensively and she is moving away from that mode of criticism in order to catalyze the

field of 'social practice art'" and, she does give herself "an out just in case I get to see this piece live, and am seduced by it" (36). She makes an energetic effort to avoid seduction and the decision to avoid the project but put it into discursive play then depends on excised public relations videotaped documentation available to be taken up and circulated in an alienated manner and mediated form. The validity of this method and the questions it raises – how does the theatrical event become rendered into dislocatable parts? Does that circulation effect a new reality? Is it a different or extended event?

The dramaturgy and mechanics that enable us to ask those questions about Kupper's methodology can be traced back to Brecht and Walter Benjamin. Theater as a live and synchronous event, where what is shared is shared all at the same time among those in attendance can be thought otherwise through dramaturgical conventions and new media technologies. Because *Disabled Theater* insists upon the playing out of all the mechanisms and conventions both internal and seemingly external but adjacent to the theatrical event that sanction exclusionary behaviors, Kuppers becomes entangled too – she is caught up in the theatrical dispositif that Bel exposes. Dispositives depend on binary associations to create modes of and allegiances to identification and identities – and so even as it critiques the paradigm, it produces evidence of its power. *Disabled Theater* and Bel become Kupper's straw dog against which she articulates the difference of cultural production where disability culture meets social practice art. But the utopian strategy in *Disabled Theater*, whose completion is always deferred, is that it labors to outwit binary paradigms by foregrounding the conventions upon which they depend, and exhausting them of their meaning, as Andre Lepecki writes of Bel's project in his earlier performance work.

And, why hold back for fear of being seduced or captivated? Why avoid the seduction, which in the case of *Disabled Theater* allows the spectator to experience the frantic tarantella of codes, histories and periperformatives of disability's dispositives that theater has produced and which dance in the mind of the spectator? Brecht is the fallback here – where alienation becomes the paradigmatic position from the spectator could analyze the information in a dialectical fashion and from that synthesis, formulate a logical social response. Better to begin to catalog the additional dangers to these uncomfortable pleasures that Brecht didn't flag, not the least is an almost masochistic spectatorial paralysis induced through these dizzying oscillations – and adjacent to that is pleasure of cohering as an ephemeral and temporary community bonded only by this experience of discomfort – not via Aristotelian

identification. For as Koppers relates, her informant sought refuge from the audience members around her, "looking at each other, wide-eyed in awe." And so the question becomes, if one remains captivated and captive to the production and as it was with me, revisiting the work over the course of its run, might I recode the exclusion of Bel from the field Koppers is working to promote?

In *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture*, Rey Chow looks back to Foucault and begins her text with a quote from *Dits and Ecrits*. Foucault notes the task the contemporary philosopher, and of philosophy itself, could well be to analyze the matrix of entrapment and reflect how philosophy is captured inside it. Chow asks, "What are these relations of power in which we are caught and in which philosophy itself... has been entangled? (Foucault in Chow: 1). For Bel, theater, becomes the exemplary dispositif through which to process that question, for it gathers together heterogeneous elements and historically it has been the mechanism that consolidates and performatively naturalizes concepts, categories and identities on real bodies through specularly, embodiment, affect, and discursivity. Theater produces and instantiates categories by means of visible, speaking and dynamic bodies and is reiterative over time; theater also comes to represent and reiterate those categories and structure. Dispositives such as theater are spectacular conjoining mechanisms.

But Chow presses her reader to consider entanglement differently, where "entanglements might be conceivable through partition and partiality rather than conjunction and intersection, and through disparity rather than equivalence" (2). This refiguration of association follows dispersions, lines of flight, and recaptivations at paradigmatic sites like theater, where someone – perhaps that would be Bel or myself – willingly submits to becoming captivated and captive. This submission allows us to ask whether theatrical reharrowing might reframe or offer up different ways to follow or pose the consequences of the dispositif? Via readings of stories and films where, "we encounter fictional characters who can easily be labeled mad but whose madness, or state of being captivated lends the stories their perverse psychological textures," Chow revisits these cultural productions to investigate how proliferating, baffling and paradoxical entanglements of forms immobilize against good logic or even self-preservation (6-7).

Kafka invented the most famous harrow, an imaginary wooden contraption that immobilized the condemned, and was designed to puncture their bodies, draw blood that spelled out their specific juridical sentence.

The prisoner was unable to see the written text on her body. Instead, knowledge was conferred by the piercing of the needles slowly over time. The mechanism's pedagogical function was linked to the way that it functioned as theater. Without the body of the sovereign present, the harrow was an instrument of governmentality that depended on theatrical spectatorship. In the story, both audience and the prisoner became enchanted over a long *durée*. The mechanism broke down (an early case of planned obsolescence, upon which commodity fetishism depends) close to the story's conclusion but not before the prisoner's body (in which the final captive is the harrow's former designer and operator) expired in a state of agonized transcendence. The story concludes with the citizen's call for a better and more compassionate technology and the narrator's, narrow escape from the town, first to the island's perimeter, inhabited by the town's outcasts, and then to a boat which we presume takes him to somewhere different so that he can recount this strangeness of this tale. Kafka's rendering of captivation, capture, self-annihilation and a singular a line of flight made possible by means of narration poses the question of how or even whether to outplay a paradigm via a mechanics of narration? How does Kafka's anecdote reveal the effect of discursivity and coding, but refuse the companion fantasy of explaining them away or fully evading capture? Kafka's story is memorable because it reveals all the codes of the paradigm and is neither a story of progress or uplift or morality. Instead, and almost clinically, it describes a paradigm where justice, writing and bodies come together and we readers, as the narrator's proxies, circulate within and around that lure.

In *Disabled Theater*, Bel reharrows theatrical mechanisms for the purpose of bafflement. It isn't a question of *how* to experience Bel's coding and circulation of how he took on the company's actors as theatrical subjects and adopted the audition format as a dramaturgical structure to rehearse his project of investigating the theater as an affect mechanism and an apparatus of cognition. It is whether the leap can be made to recognize it as a poetics of captivation and to ask whether that position enables or allows all imbricated in that matrix to approach what Agamben calls the "whatever" being (1.1). For example, Kupper allows herself to caught up in a normative economy of production and circulation where *Disabled Theater* is viewed only once and contemplated with a number of other works during one exhausting day at an art fair such as Documenta (where Koppers could be didn't see the work) or a performance festival like New York's Performa (where Leon Hilton, who writes a sympathetic and careful engagement with the work does) or the



Uovo Festival in Milan (where I first saw it and which programs “unruly” works) or at the Singapore Festival of the Arts (a city which is the antithesis of unruliness and where I last saw the performance). Those modes of presentation have their own will to political, cultural and economic power. But in the hit and run muchness of the festival or fair, the work has to be “gotten” for its content quickly. In that particular mode of reception, Bel’s complicated intent is reduced and the cognitive processes it interpellates is stunted. For me, engaging repeatedly with the *Disabled Theater* over the long dureé, I find that captivation multiplies and opposes the foreclosure of the experience.

Instead an open-ended engagement and captivation with theater’s subject, histories and mechanisms opens out to all those captivated in *Disabled Theater’s* isomorphic structure. There seems to be something of value – for all parties –including the value of risk – which is only afforded to subjects who have some agency in the situation. The long dureé also allowed me to experience how the production outwits a reductive reading of genetic discourse – both theatrical and human bodied – that eradicates the possibility of experiencing the glimmer and twinkle of singularity that may produce very concrete lines of flight. In this case I note that singularity is made through these isomorphic staged moments where, following Agamben’s quote in the epigraph, the common properties of all parties involved become more indistinct through this set of operations.

While the production of *Disabled Theater* retains a trace of dramatic plot, enhanced by Bel’s periperformative that directs the audience in Aristotelian fashion to emulate the journey of Bel’s reversal and recognition of devaluing value. (A cast member, Gianni Blumer, breaks the code of normal theater where one doesn’t publically complain about one’s director, and instead, uses his onstage confessional stage moment to complain about Bel’s elimination of his dance solo during rehearsal. What happens next, without explanation, is that the excised dance solos are reinstated right before the final bow). That reconsideration of a directorial choice seems to place Bel as the protagonist of the piece moving from that state of incomprehension to reconciliation or synchronization with his affective register. But the work takes the principles of performance to incorporate other structures that make an apparatus that is useful for the actors and not merely for Bel or for the spectator. Bel foregrounds those as well and so there are possibilities for the images and the performer’s release. Almost every moment of *Disabled Theater* is YouTube ready. Each time an actor steps up to the microphone to answer one of the questions above, or

takes the stage to perform a dance solo, the event could easily be extracted and circulate as a performance vignette. Each of the six operations listed above function independently. But Kupperts shows the significance of the partage's recapture.

Bel's choice of their order and aggregation hearkens back to the format of the Broadway musical, *A Chorus Line*, a work celebrated for its break with commercial musical theater's dependence on a progress narrative and for the original production's struggle to offer cultural and economic credit to the performers whose life stories served as the basis for the performed narratives. *Disabled Theater* and *A Chorus Line* share the same order: show oneself, identify oneself in terms of the state, confess to the way one self-identifies, display one's taste, virtuosity and spirit through movement, reflect and finally, cohere into a group. Because of *A Chorus Line*, this order appears natural and yet could easily be differently aggregated. This moment-to-moment assemblage is anti-Aristotelian and does align with Brecht's fractionalization of perspective that can be cut up, collaged and repurposed.

But Bel is too clever merely to reiterate the Brecht vs. Aristotle throwdown, or rework *A Chorus Line* into a neurodivergent rendition of the backstage musical. But Bel hearkens back to theater's genetics to play on the codes a *Chorus Line* naturalized. *A Chorus Line's* enormous popularity was partially attributable to its oscillation between actor and character, set and stage, life story and staged narrative. Bel, as in all his projects, foregrounds the codes of dramaturgy and theatrics to make its effects visible to the spectator whose will is brought to bear on the process – like the spectator's drive to make the disjunctive cohere and the artist's choice to work within a medium that synchronizes. Moving the isomorphic action from the stage and into the mind of the cerebral spectator is Bel's trisomic shift – a way to add more code to theater to create it as a machinery that can approach becoming indifferent to the common property that disability as a dispositif makes coherent through embodiment – it is his effort to address theater's effect on the bodies that are aggregated by thoughts that theater directs to reaction in a predetermined manner. This production expends a great effort to achieve that goal, and yet it still it can be read also as an uplift and progress narrative that cannot get to "the fragile moment of the individual" which is to say the presentation of singularity. The best the show can produce is that all professional actors as indifferently "special," – not as neurodivergent, but as actors – much like the principle dancer Cassie who retreats to become a member of the chorus in *A Chorus Line* insists.

Disabled Theater demonstrates that even the liberal and seemingly well intentioned gesture of direction is an exclusionary act that eradicates the drive to represent the "being such that it is" of Agamben's coming community. The spectator can only reflect on that idea by witnessing representation's failure – through the contemplation of Bel as protagonist's inventive efforts to baffle the theatrical codes and conventions and capture those flights. The contemplation of conventions becomes even more heightened for the spectator because in so much of this work Theater Hora's actors with Bel succeed in reconfiguring dramaturgy enough so that it moves the spectators closer to what we cannot capture – it almost but not quite touches the indifference that Agamben identifies via creative re-figuration of discredited and naturalized codes. The audience get a twinkle of how singularities might be valued only for their "being as such" and not in identity terms.

To make this happen fully, *Disabled Theater*, suggests that we leap into the machine. Bel almost, but not quite, makes that leap, and I follow, as Bel's proxy. We experience what happens when one consents or becomes willing to be mesmerized and captivated by the twinkle of discredited binding mechanisms such as identification, empathy and compassion. From this immobilized position and when captivated in this manner, what plays out in one's mind are one's own cognitive linkages between the stage action and discredited racist, sexist, ableist and cultural fantasies. Ugly feelings, as Sianne Ngai observes, may be understood as an index of how those logics linger in and emanate from in the realms of our consciousness because affect, when it rises to the level of discursive feelings, has come to be recognized via those very dreams and fantasies upon which our fantasy of self and identities rest.

Chow notes that a formation of community coheres, a singularity based on the annihilation of the fantasy of the subject that almost incomprehensibly depends on a deeper and deeper plunge into the logic of capital and neoliberalism and asks about its cause and its potential.

By what exactly are these characters so captivated (...)? Is it sheer coincidence that these memorable tales of captivation, with their protagonist's characteristic propinquity toward bondage, masochism, and self-annihilation, have emerged amid modern contexts of conflicting allegiances? Should such bondage, masochism and self-annihilation be taken for a final enclosure or an anarchical opening, a recoiling of the self into... the infinite? (7)

Then the question of *how* to experience Bel's coding and circulation of how he took on the company's actors as theatrical subjects and adopted the audition format as a dramaturgical structure to rehearse his project of

investigating the theater as an affect mechanism and an apparatus of cognition becomes a different task. From the vantage point of attraction and capture, it becomes easier to experience the fracturing of the fantasy of the autonomous self through a poetics of captivation. Then the apparatus better reveals itself. Without being captivated and paralyzed, all practices and discourses are automatically valued and ordered, upholding the paradigm that traps both spectator and critic in generating normative analyses. For me, engaging repeatedly with the *Disabled Theater* over the long durée, I experienced Bel's willingness to become captivated. It also allowed me to experience how the production outwits a reductive reading of genetics that eradicates the possibility of experiencing the glimmer and twinkle of singularity – one which may produce lines of flight where singularity, following Agamben, can become indistinct and valued as “a being such that it is” through this set of operations.

Moving from the abstract to the concrete, I will isolate one moment of this work – but there are so many others – that illustrates how Bel's effort to achieve this phenomenon operated. All of the dialogue I quote was scribbled in my notebook during the course of the third and last time I saw the production, in Singapore in 2014, which is important only because my method of remembering is indistinguishable from Remo Beuggert's.

In the third action, when Bel asks cast members to step up to the microphone one by one, and say what they believe their handicap to be, the translator, Chris Weinheimer first calls Beuggert. Beuggert steps downstage and says “my handicap is that I have a learning weakness. That means I can't remember a thing. For example, when I have to pass on information it gets lost. I leave something out. I mix it all up. What I started to do recently is write down into a little notebook so it doesn't get lost. Okay then, I am a bad messenger.” (After each speech, Weinheimer translates the actors' speech into English. He flags that mechanism at the beginning of the performance when he explains that Bel needed a translator in rehearsals because he did not speak Swiss-German, the actors' native tongue. That mechanism is reharrowed onstage through Weinheimer as Bel's proxy.) Next Matthias Brucker is called. He says, “I have trisomy 21 and I have as well a mentally handicap.” Fabienne Villiger follows. “Okay then. I have Down Syndrome. So what?” Tiziana Pagliaro. “I don't know.” Then Damian Bright steps up to the microphone – six more actors will succeed him after he steps away and rejoins the cast, who are all casually sitting upstage in a semicircle before and after their turn at the microphone. Bright says exactly the same words

as he did in 2013 when I first saw the show in Milan. He noted that his handicap is Down Syndrome. He tells the audience that it was named after John Langdown Down, and also called trisomy 21. Then he smirks and his eyes twinkle as he interprets those fact for our benefit: "That means I have one more chromosome than you."

From my vantagepoint in the audience and among the parade of disability's proliferating discursive frameworks, I think not in succession but so rapidly I cannot distinguish the overlapping thoughts: does Bright smirk because he does not comprehend how he misapplies capitalist values (where more is more) to the way most of us in the audience prize the fewer copies of the twenty-first chromosome which we value to maximize our cognitive capacity? Or is it just that Bright's timing is off? Maybe he is aware that he will get a laugh but he is not so virtuosic an actor that he can mask that anticipation by suppressing the smirk? And (or but), can one characterize bad acting as a disability, except when it happens in the theater? But (and, and) when one is in an avant-garde performance like say, Richard Maxwell's, that tenant doesn't really hold, right? Maybe Bright just doesn't value the comedic stage convention of acting "straight" like I do. Maybe it's Bel's logic. Or maybe I misinterpret that Bright's conflation of the logics of capitalism with the logic of genetics is deliberate and I should feel shame (which I do and which I feel emanating from those around me) for my assumption that irony is beyond Bright's capacity to convey. For the entire theatrical production, Bel depends on proliferation of associative thought which becomes a mode of bafflement. Bel works with theater's delight in isomorphic structures that too easily link to the logic of capital. I also feel delight in this junkie's rush of felt thought which for me is often is the delight of the theater.

This attempt to capture my cognitive loops and to make sense of how Bright, in collaboration with Bel, released what I would, at other times and in other places, view as obsessive and pathological knot of cognitive logic and a dense web of shame doesn't explain its effect on me as a viewer. The isomorphic tangle immobilizes me in and with felt logic and the logic of feelings. Over and over, what the staged actions of *Disabled Theater* elicits through an affective engagement with the actors who foreground how they are perceived through the discursive and nondiscursive linkages that genetic coding elicit, are these simultaneous cognitive operations. They prompt the spectators to contend with how the operations of the theater has naturalized and assigned value through a deployment with conventions that link to

other dispositifs, and how it does so through the specific coding of that elicits and names bodied expression. But the effect is getting caught in a trap – and quite possibly, while Bel cannot baffle enough to fully outwit the paradigm in which we are caught up, the work is a gesture toward the necessity of the effort and the future possibilities of theater’s transformation.

Barthes notes that “The Neutral” is a fantasy and what may be most exciting in that figuration is its gesture to the utopian. In this case the gesture is filtered through Giorgio Agamben’s insistence on reevaluation of value by Agamben’s linking the “whatever being” to the indistinct figure of speech exemplified by the adjective “coming” and the undoing an identity based “community” that sorts value. It is in this space that *Disabled Theater* does not merely serve as critique but instead becomes productive – after Bright I would name this strategy, “trisomic” – an operation of augmentative genetics. “Coming,” as gerund form, emphasizes formal indistinction (being a non-finite verb that can function as a noun or as an adverb or adjective and which, in its Latin root demands an action, for it means to be carried out) as a praxis. This coming of a different mode of inhabiting and navigating the tensions between distinguishing and becoming indistinct is “slippery” also when it comes to obliterating categories that have been socially and politically injurious and can be taken up to insist upon forms of redress. This goes to the heart of Petra Kuppers critique of Bel in particular, and the avant-garde in general, which has sought out the materiality and the embodied behaviors of actors that index neurocultures and physically divergent biosociality to think through aesthetic forms.

Linking these categories to embodied acts as evidence of symptoms that can devalue social status can be attributed in part to the theater as a visibility machine. The machine can recalibrate difference, but often doesn’t eradicate or move past the paradigm. Whatever techniques Bel uses to baffle and neutralize, still retain properties made common by the proscenium frame. But Agamben offers the challenge that Bel takes up – to evince a structure that offers a shift or opening for a weak messianic proposition – a present movement toward an un-forclosed and always deferred futurity that finds different modes of social beings becoming indistinct through the repeated attempts and partial successes of disordering theater’s dispositifs. Without that movement, and without the weak messianic impulse of any theater director or choreographer, there would be no grappling with forms of creation and abandonment that shifts theater’s will to produce and reiterate hierarchies of relations and social and political subjects.

Thinking and feeling from the paralysis that overcame me during Damien Bright's response to Bel, in this essay I am trying to read *Disabled Theater* as a trisomic encounter or stage. It is an entanglement and a minute shift in the codes or the genetics of theater that might neutralize theater's exemplary capacity to performatively produce social subjects. A trisomic engagement succumbs to the theatrical lure and it baffles. Bel achieves that state by deploying the intensities of theatrical isomorphism. A trisomic entanglement also allows the historical racial, gendered, ethnic and ableist fantasies to irrupt like the logic of a joke, that arise not from the stage but from within the spectator. For me, the question then becomes what the trisomic encounter can do to all parties who allow themselves the experience of that produce different consequences for all entangled in the trap – in this case – of the discursive category of disability and the implications of abandoning the avant-garde's continual interrogation of forms.

An immersive engagement with the trisomic stage allows for flashpoints to emerge and expose the codes that maintain the paradigm's productivity. And a trisomic entanglement dislodges the formal gestures that allow disability to cohere together. Like that bad penny that keeps turning up, there are so many framing devices that insist on the positive property common to performers. From the vantagepoint of the trisomic I can understand Kuppers dismissal of *Disabled Theater* in TDR as "being cued to boredom" (35). This framing calls up the histories of pronouncing onstage subjects who isomorphically appear close in performance to performing themselves as subjects of a historically stigmatizing category as "tired" and dismissing the attention to form as an elitist and therefore undemocratic property belonging to an the avant-garde and (or) paradoxically of low aesthetic value. But really, it comes from *A Chorus Line*, a popular work whose formal intervention had some of the most far-reaching effects on the evacuation of how the modern theatrical economy depended on the fantasy of the single author or director as the lone genius. The production and all of its collateral cultural products and productions also undermined the economic hierarchies of payment to principles and chorus members (although it didn't revolutionize or equalize the disparity of pay for different categories of artists).

And in the unapologetic structure of her formal critique, Kuppers' avoidance of the scene of entanglement echoes the reactionary and socially damaging position of dance critic Arlene Croce who in 1994 declined to review Bill T. Jones' production of *Still/Here* because of its over determination

for Jones placed bodies onstage that Croce articulated as uber-potent surrogates of illness. Koppers writes that she has put “victim art” past her – but she repeats Croce’s act. And that act has its many historical precedents as well having overdetermined all that critique around overdetermined embodied materiality that has succeeded it. But Croce’s refusal is linked as a critique of the normative strategy of theater criticism circa 1974 by New York Magazine’s theater critic, John Simon, who quite violently dismissed Robert Wilson’s production of *A Letter To Queen Victoria* specifically because of his avant-garde enrapturement with categorical indeterminacy. Simon attended Wilson’s piece, but like Koppers and Croce, was stubbornly unwilling to become captivated or consider the potential of a trisomic stage (apparently unlike queer choreographer Jerome Robbins) precisely because disparate aesthetic categories, forms and histories were becoming indistinct and entangled. Simon also presaged the link between queer and categorical refusal. Simon wrote:

Though the work calls itself an opera, it is merely tableaux vivants done to monotonous nonmusic and accompanied by meaningless verbalizing and gyrations. The visuals are derived principally from Chirico, Magritte, and (except they are nowhere so heterosexual) Delvaux, and the words are Dada, but with the wit left out. That such things should succeed in the world that has lost all sense of what is art (to say nothing of all sense of what is sense) is not astonishing. But what is queer is that people who should know better, e.g. Jerome Robbins, should invoke the word genius for his mindless farrago. (John Simon on theater, 44)

What Simon really hates, and has no problems suppressing, is the use of Christopher Knowles by Wilson who “knows better.” What irks him is how Wilson succumbs to be captivated anyway and in fact, resorts to an isomorphic structure that imitates Knowles’ modes of embodiment. The sharing of credit regarding authorship offers cultural capital to Knowles to be sure, but it also acknowledges the indeterminacy of authorship that always exists in the making of forms and knowledge collaboratively.

What is truly pitiful though is that a fifteen-year old autistic boy should be a kind of co-author and main performer here, his sad condition put on tasteless display. Wilson has worked with handicapped children and his writing and cast may themselves be specimens of a dementedly self-induced autism, but all that does not justify having the poor boy whirl about like a deranged dervish and spout insensate and ill-articulated verbiage – even if Wilson



proclaims it genius and matches it with similar cavortings and a cacophony of his own. Unless we bring back bearbaiting and visits to the asylum for entertainment, this sort of thing, however cloaked in euphemism is not to be countenanced. I am also leery of Wilson's making his grandmother, aged 88, stay up late and fatiguingly in order to perform in this and other Wilson works: it is one thing to give one's life for art, another for autism. (44-45)

Simon's offhanded grandmother comment is also not at all tangential or extraneous – it is in fact central to the positioning of submission and captivity as a posture that can baffle hierarchal assumptions. There is no indication that Wilson's grandmother was "made" to do anything – that she could not consent to the conditions of her aesthetic labor. Indeed, who even knows if she did not initiate or ask to be included so to elevated her visibility, enable her to perform creative labor at a time when many women her age are confined to the home or an institution and whose inclusion staged a genetic and genealogical link. Read alongside Bel's embrace of neurodivergence but the disappearance of Hossle and Meier, it calls up what is still inadmissible in this isomorphic lure – aging female bodies whose aesthetic physical presentation in performance conjoins and expresses sexuality, affective unruliness and a resistance to the social effects of aging.

So much of this critique and the aporia that is not an aporia of *Disabled Theater* rests on anxieties of consent, which also become more hypervisible when isomorphism in the theater is hyper-intensified and the knots and entanglements between the subject and the subject as actor, playing herself onstage are tightened. Simon's critique of Wilson's grandmother's state doesn't accommodate for how the baroque stare might accommodate for differentiated ability and risk. The evening I saw Damian Bright dance in Milan, he seemed overcome and Chris Weinheimer, the onstage translator and stage manager who also serves as a proxy for Bel escorted him offstage. Bright later reappeared and nothing else was made of this incident. The isomorphic structure Bel formulates is flexible enough to allow for these lines of flight and recapture. In the trisomic stage, the spectator is immobilized but party to all the codes so that s/he can accept this partiality, and can recognize the necessity of the exit and disappearance. In TDR, Kupperts lauds the production of *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich* by Back to Back Theater at the expense of the more indeterminate *Disabled Theater* for its more definable structure which she posits as more pleasurable precisely because that work is far more recognizable as a play within a play with distinct qualitative differences rather than an isomorphic structure. As such it diminishes the

realm of the trisomic where the viewer consciously is overloaded in the work of discriminating, sorting valuing element. As such, although her intent is to celebrate and expand the notion of disability culture, the mode of her critique follows the dismissive logic of Croce and Simon and is a reharroing of old ground, dependent on the valuation of binary logic.

Clearly Bel with Theater Hora doesn't or cannot recalibrate *all* of the hierarchies of theater that control the frame. But, like Borges *Library of Babel* or *A Chorus Line's* wall of mirrors, when failure or success is exposed, more hierarchies irrupt and proliferate from which the incapacitated spectator can succumb to the captive position in order to comprehend the mechanisms of paradigms. Bel, following Barthes, cannot achieve "theater degree zero." although he tries to disable the harrow. Thinking with Barthes, Bel experiments with a mode of theater that casts a trap baited by his use of overdetermined material. In this instance and what seems like the limit case for theater, the bait and lure is embodied and enacted neurodivergence. The category is itself a wildly unstable fantasy and when a professional actor who places her body onstage to be read through that discursive lens, the best result is that all parties involved might meet the situation with a "baroque stare." The pioneer in the field of disability studies, Rosemary Garland Thompson best described this mode of looking as one that "bears witness to a failure of intelligibility... [it is] an overly intense engagement with looking. A baroque stare is unrepentant abandonment to the unruly, to that which refuses to conform to the dominant order of knowledge. As such, baroqueness resides not in the visual object but rather in the encounter between starrer and staree. Baroque staring entangles the viewer and viewed in an urgent exchange that redefines both" (50).

Proliferating codes outside of the theater, writing or performance cannot be captured and can never be calibrated precisely enough or in exponential quantities to neutralize stigmatizing systems of valuation. In fact, however brilliantly Bel renders the stage as a coded information exchange system and how much we bring to it to easily suspend our disbelief that the theater can extricate us from the tyranny of the paradigm the audience begins to realize that Bel's choices are only the low fruit on the ever-proliferating tree. What is more exciting about the proposition are the possibilities it offers – an alternate way of experiencing the trisomic where spectatorship and performing risks entanglements that allow for fugitivity and flight, captivation and capture, bafflement and paralysis.

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