



Corpuscule Danse



Muue Dance Creations



Rachel Gorman



CURATING THE AESTHETICS

OF DEAF, DISABILITY & MAD ARTS

for CAPACOA @ CINARS
Blow Your Mind Panel



Chandra Melting Tallow



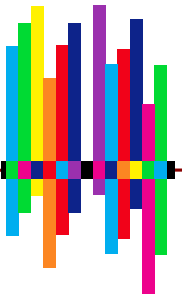
Alan Shain



PDA! Crip Your World!!



Lyle Victor Albert



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CREDITS

This aesthetic framework was developed by **Michele Decottignies**, with continued advising and feedback from:

- **Dr. Rachel Gorman**, Revolutionary Forms
- **Syrus Marcus Ware**, PDA (Performance. Disability. Art)
- **Alan Shain**, Smashing Stereotypes Productions
- **Meg Torwl**, Integral Media
- **Dr. Kirsty Johnston**, UBC Drama
- **Charlene Hellson**, Independent, Artist
- **Chandra Melting Tallow**, Independent Artist
- **Frank Hull**, Independent Artist
- **Shara Weaver & Renata Sutter**, Propeller Dance
- **Geoff McMurchy**, Kickstart Arts
- **Ruth Ruth Stackhouse**, Mad Pride (Friendly Spike Theatre Band)



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PRESENTATION LANGUAGE

My use of the term “disability” here is meant as inclusive of all people on the impairment spectrum.

“Dis Art” is inclusive of Deaf, Disability & Mad Art.

I’m using shortened forms for ease of communication only, not to minimize the cultural distinctions between the many different communities that comprise the dis arts domain.



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CANADA'S DIS ARTS DOMAIN

45 companies

4,500 artists/ arts workers

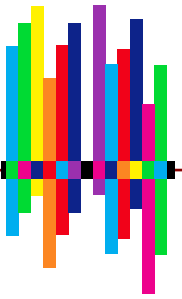
45 years old

Not a small domain

Not an emerging/ amateur domain

Not a site of charity nor therapy

(aka not exclusively for personal “self-improvement”
or never-ending/ continued professional “capacity development”)



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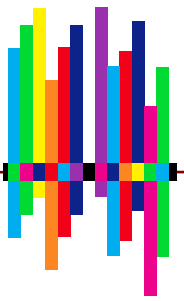
THE RISE OF DIS ARTS

“Disability arts marks the growing political power of disabled people [who] use it to counter cultural misrepresentation, establish disability as a valued human condition, [and] shift control to disabled people.”
(The Ryerson RBC Institute for Disability Studies Research & Education)

Canada has the oldest dis arts history in the world

Dis arts has been an integral aspect of the professional arts ecology since the rise of “Canadian Culture” in the 1970s

While other countries were advocating for “access to the arts”, we were already engaged in “the production of dis arts”



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DIS ARTS HISTORY IN CANADA

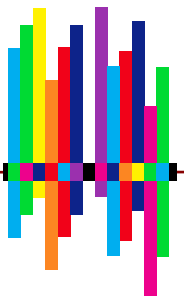
1970 - 2000: Dis Arts Production

- positioned disabled artists within the broader arts ecology
- achieved a considerable amount of artistic acclaim
- large volume of work produced by independent Deaf, Disabled and Mad artists

2000-2010: Dis Arts Presenting

- via dis-led, dis arts festivals:
 - **Mad Pride**, Toronto; Friendly Spike Theatre Band (1990+)
 - **Kickstart Disability Arts & Culture Festival**, Vancouver; S4DAC
 - **Balancing Acts Disability Arts Festival**, Calgary; Stage Left
 - **Art With Attitude**, Toronto; Ryerson University

**This festival circuit established Canada's national dis arts domain,
as well as some inclusive models of dis arts presenting.**



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ACCESS & INCLUSION HISTORY

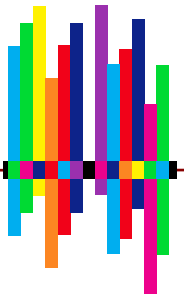
2000 - now: Arts Access Presenting

- the rise of the Charity Model
- non-dis-led festivals

- **Madness & The Arts World Festival (2003)**
- **Abilities Art Festival (2005)**
 - **Able Artists (2011)**
 - **Spark Arts (2011)**
- **The Art of Disability (2014)**
- **Project EveryBody (2015)**
 - and on it goes...

This circuit enabled our stakeholders to take-over the dis arts domain.

Because of this thing called “the charitable model of disability”



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THE RISE OF CHARITY

The Charitable Model of Disability positions disabled people as in need of help.

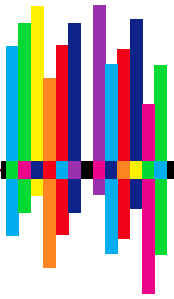
Because we are perceived as unable to do things for ourselves, our stakeholders believe they must look after us, create opportunities for us, protect us and make decisions for us.

The charitable model was imposed on the dis arts domain, by stakeholders who insisted that we meet them where they are at:

THEM: In need of disability awareness & education.

US: In need of equitable production funding & market access.

Guess whose need took precedence?



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ACCESS DISPLACES ART

2010 - 2015: Arts Policy

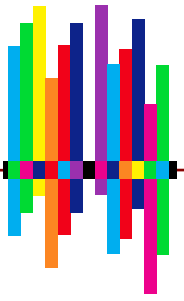
- institutionalized dis arts policy and funding
- prioritized access and inclusion over artistic production
- 90% of CCA's "dis arts" funding was granted to inclusive arts companies (and we're not recognized by their peers as "dis arts" orgs)

CONSEQUENCE:

Artistic authority & funding/ resources are now primarily granted to those giving us access/ including us.

Disabled artists and companies are up against an escalating pattern of economic inequity in arts funding.

Most domain work is now focused on access and inclusion, disability awareness and education.



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DIS ARTS EQUITY

Dis Arts in Canada has continuously been threatened by arts institutions and charitable organizations that seek to promote disability art while dismissing it's political base.

(Dr. Rachel Gorman)

DDMAAC's Disability Equity Strategy

- position senior disabled artists as domain leaders & experts
 - establish disability as a valued human condition
- affirm impairment as a source of aesthetic appreciation/ beauty
- rehabilitate art itself, by accommodating rather than adapting
- prioritize access for dis arts over access for disabled people



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CURATING ACCESS

Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis access:





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CURATING ACCESS

Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis access:

project EVERYBODY
open door group

International
DisAbility Film
Culture & Art
Festival 2015

Wednesday Sept. 16th 2015 2:00pm - 8:00pm (Film start at 6:00pm)
Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre
181 Roundhouse Mews (Corner of Dowie and Pacific)
Free Admission | Venue is wheelchair accessible | ASL Interpreter will be available

open door group | Vancity | Abilities | The Wellbeing Alliance

Facebook: projecteverybody | Twitter: @pceverybody | Website: www.projecteverybody.ca



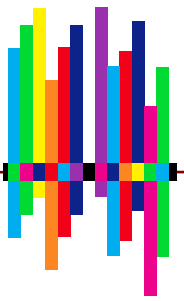
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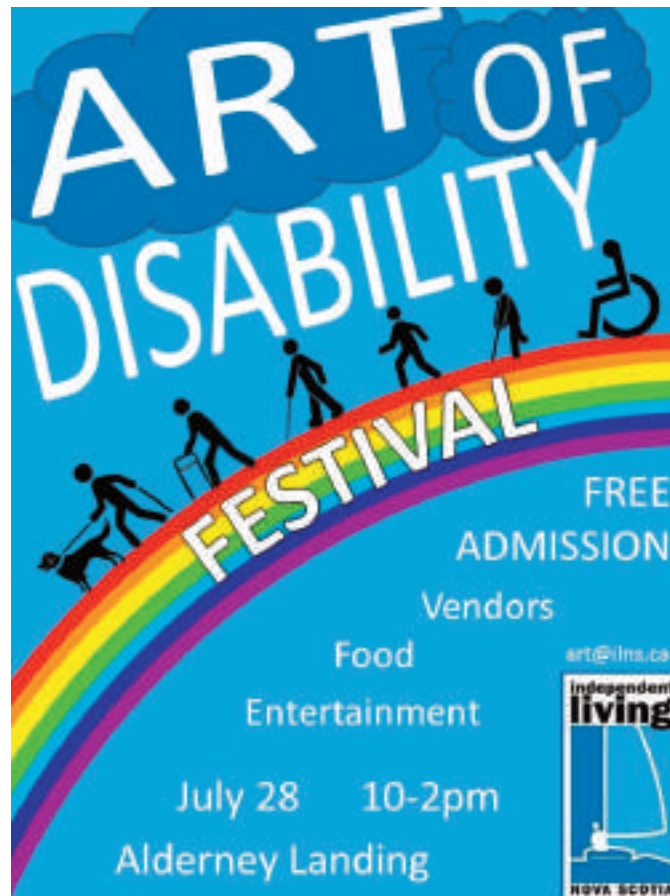


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Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis access:





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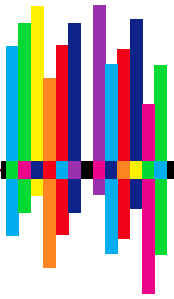
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NOTICE WHAT'S MISSING?





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CURATING ART

Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis art:





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CURATING ART

Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis art:



Janna Brown, Still Echoes Resound

Tangled Art + Disability presents:

STRANGE BEAUTY

April 9-25, 2015

401 Richmond Street West



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CURATING ART

Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis art:

THE OTHER FILM FESTIVAL

19th - 23rd
SEPTEMBER
2012

ARTS HOUSE
NORTH MELBOURNE
TOWN HALL

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PAST FESTIVAL
Visit the 2010 website to learn more about The Other Film Festival

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

NEW CINEMA BY, WITH AND ABOUT PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

FULL 2012 FESTIVAL WEBSITE COMING SOON

ARTS+ACCESS VICTORIA



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CURATING ART

Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis art:



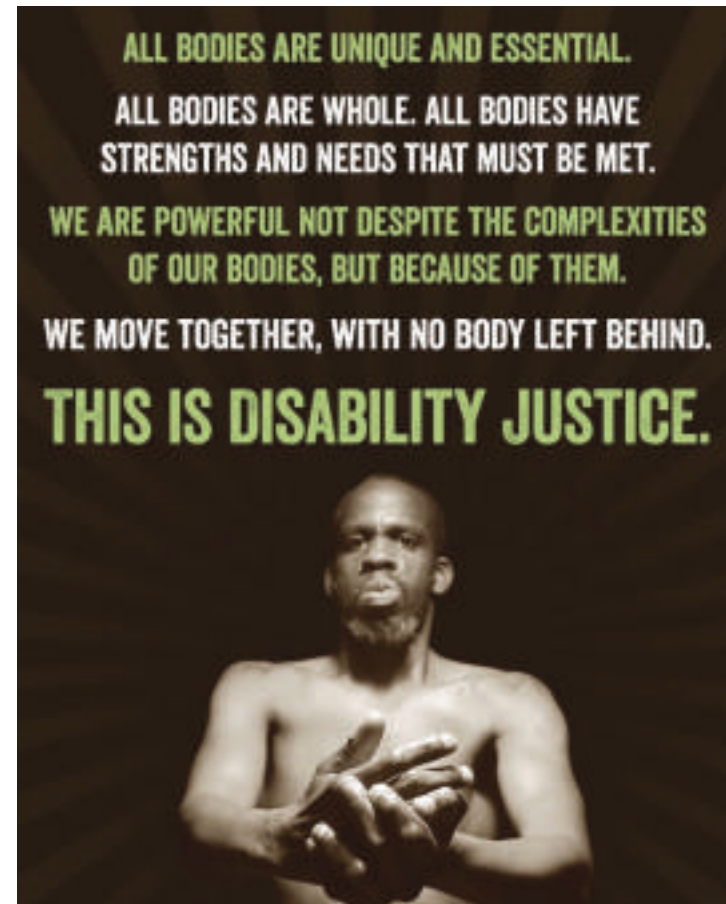


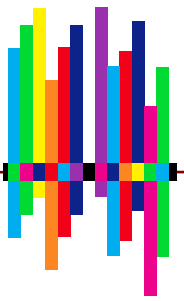
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CURATING ART

Examples of dis arts festivals produced by those promoting dis art:





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NOTICE ANY DIFFERENCES?

PROMOTING ACCESS:

Don't dis my Ability

DisABILITY

Art + Access

Art for EveryBody

Disabled artists are invisible and not central to the promotion of the work.

Disability is minimized.

PROMOTING ART:

Not Just Another Freak Show

Strange Beauty

Skin Deep

Bodies of Work

Disabled artists are visible and central to promotion of the work.

Disability is celebrated.

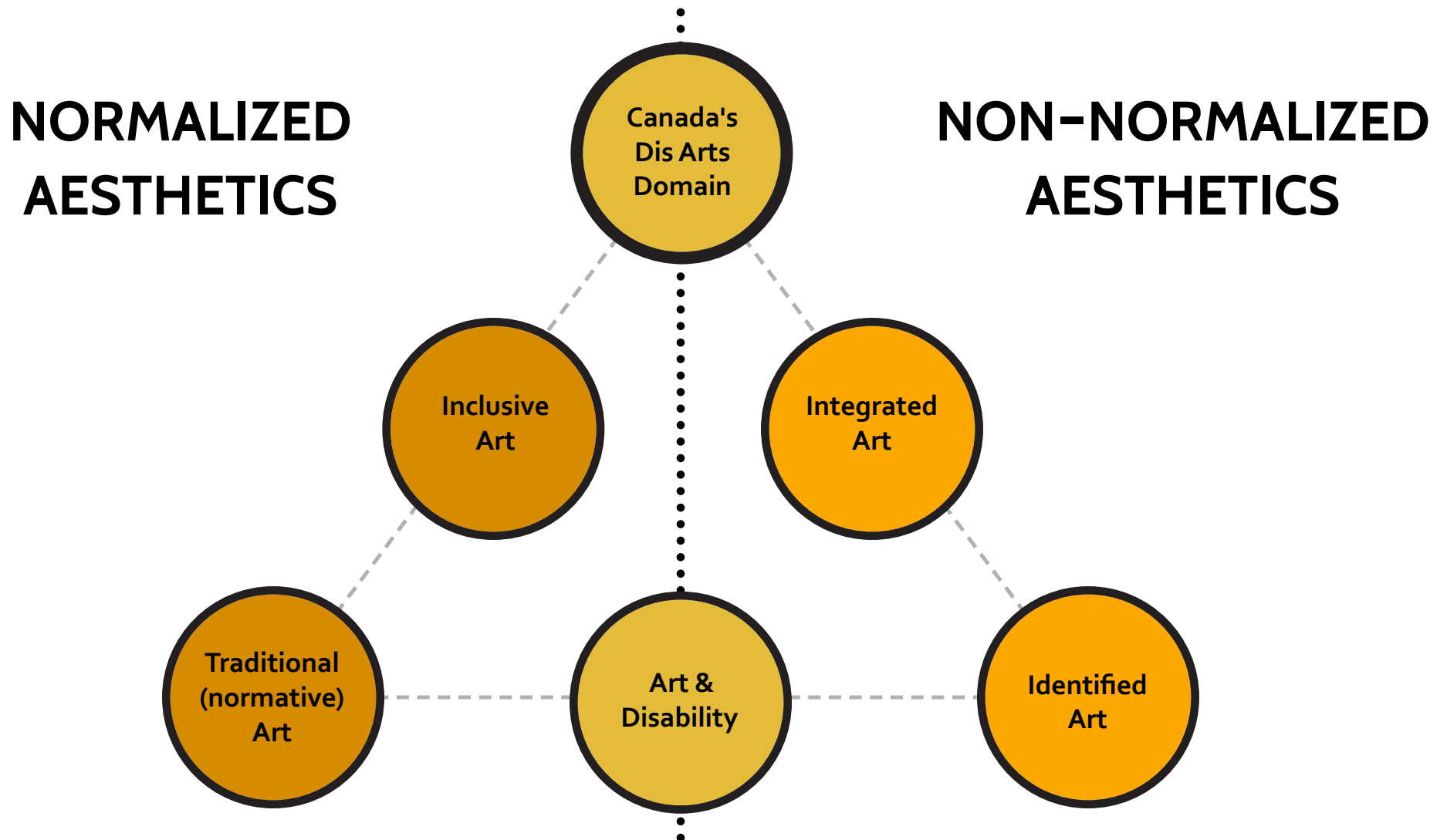


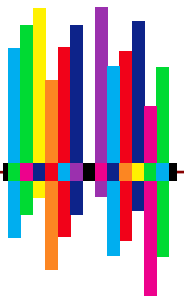
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THE CURATORIAL DIVIDE





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THE CURATORIAL DIVIDE

NORMALIZED AESTHETICS:

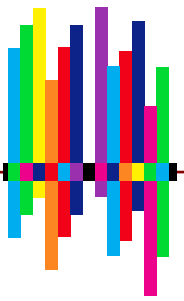
pop-culture identified

- disability is minimized
- impairment is adapted to art form in ways that satisfy aesthetic traditions/ norms
- process = adaptation
- aligned with pop-culture notions of disability as tragedy and limitation to overcome
- curated as inclusion, empowerment & improvement (therapy)

NON-NORMALIZED:

disability-identified

- disability is affirmed as diversity
- art form is adapted to disability in ways that disrupt aesthetic traditions/ norms
- process = accommodation
- aligned with Disability, Deaf and/or Mad culture(s) and disability justice
- curated as artistic innovation and transgression



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AESTHETIC APPROACHES

NORMALIZED AESTHETICS: pop-culture identified

- aesthetics of **absence** = invisibilized
- aesthetics of **innocence** = minimized
- aesthetics of **awareness** = medicalized
- aesthetics of **inclusion** = normalized

Curated as:

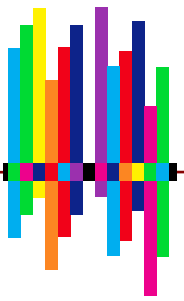
Art Brut
Kitsch
Traditional

NON-NORMALIZED: disability-identified

- aesthetics of **access** = accommodated
- aesthetics of **integration** = affirmed
- aesthetics of **inversion** = transgressed
- aesthetics of **impairment** = repurposed

Curated as:

Outsider Art
DIY (Do-it-Yourself)
& Dis-Identified



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AUDIENCE RESPONSES

NORMALIZED AESTHETICS:

pop-culture identified

“Inspiring”

“Courageous”

“Informative”

“Wow. I didn’t know they could do that”

Appreciation that the disabled artist made art (e.g. standing ovations because the actors learned their lines.)

Assessed by its public impact.

Valued for its inclusive innovation.

NON-NORMALIZED:

disability-identified

“I’ve never thought about disability like that before”

“Wow. It took me somewhere I was not expecting to go”

Appreciation of the art work and its aesthetic

Assessed by its artistic impact.

Valued for its aesthetic innovation.



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POP-CULTURE PERCEPTIONS

Victims:

We're treated as objects of tragic afflictions that burden us and society.
This perception turns us into objects of pity and paternalism.

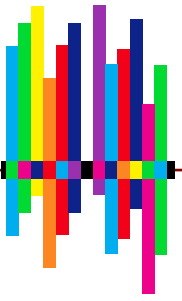
Heroes:

We only gain social acceptance when we “overcome” our disabilities.
This perception turns us into what we call Inspirational SuperCrips™!

Villains:

Throughout history, impairments have been used to represent evil and depravity. This turns us into a class of menacing, violent people that rest of society needs to be protected from.

Such perceptions represent disability as an undesirable difference.



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POP-CULTURE AESTHETICS

The Art of Objectification

"Disability" is again being treated as an object of wonderment and fascination – along with pity, paternalism and benevolence.

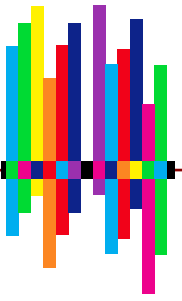
The Art of Benevolence

The disabled are included in the arts in order to help us get better. But we aren't broken people and don't need fixing.

The Art of Exoticization

Impairment is put on display and dissected in great detail, so non-disabled audiences can understand how we cope with our differences.

Such curation represents disability as an object of wonder.



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POP-CULTURE AESTHETICS

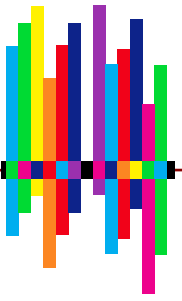
ADAPTATION

Impairments are shaped in ways that enable the “abnormal” artist to satisfy traditional (aka normative) Eurocentric standards of aesthetic appreciation.

The aesthetic goal is to make the disability appear as “normal” as possible.

We thus refer to adaptation as “normalized” aesthetics.

The disabled artist is compared to and measured against idealized notions of beauty and the human condition (that none of us in society can actually live up to!).



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DISABILITY AESTHETICS

The Art of Self-Determination

Artists with disabilities interpret "the lived experience of disability" as a process of mitigating dis/ablism and disablement.

+

The Art of Affirmation

The **aesthetics of access** = **Inclusive Design** (accommodation)

The **aesthetics of integration** = **Disability Pride** (affirmation & enrichment)

The **aesthetics of inversion** = **Inversion/ Flipping the Familiar** (transgression)

The **aesthetics of impairment** = **Artistic Innovation** (repurposing)

Impairment is positioned as a primary source of aesthetic appreciation.



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DISABILITY AESTHETICS

ACCOMMODATION

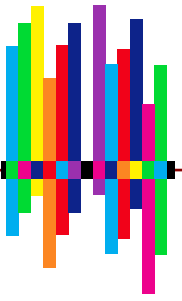
The disabled artists engage in processes of *individualized accommodation* of their own impairment(s).

Accommodation requires the art form to change, not the artist, which makes it transgressive – in that it breaks “the rules”.

Normalized aesthetics are disrupted and repurposed.

"Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize...the healthy body – and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty – as the sole determination of aesthetic appreciation."

(Tobin Siebers)



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CURATORIAL PROCESS

1. Determine your motivation:

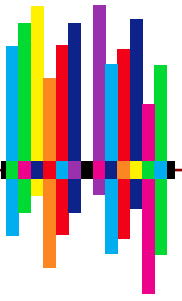
- to increase your own funding = inequitable intent
- to "help" the disabled = equitable intent (but assess the impact)
 - to promote dis arts = artistic intent
- to increase market access for dis-identified art work = aesthetic intent

2. Assess your audience's perception(s) of disability:

- the disabled aren't real artists = Community Inclusion and/or Art Therapy
 - disability is tragedy = Inspiration Porn
 - disability is fascination = Freak Show / Gimps on Parade
- disability is a source of cultural diversity & artistic enrichment = Dis Aesthetics

3. Decide to satisfy or disrupt those perceptions:

- let your own artistic vision guide you



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CURATORIAL PROCESS

4. Develop relationships with established disabled artists:

- engage in reciprocal collaboration
- in order to learn more about disability art and aesthetics as well as access/ Inclusive Design

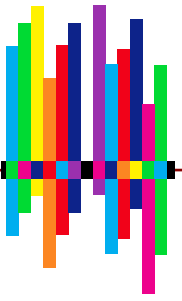
- educate yourself about the potential for innovation, not just the disability

5. Choose an aesthetic approach:

- normalized or non-normalized?
- what is right for your own audience?

6. Promote artistic excellence and innovation:

- flip the familiar to hook your audience, via a tag line
- then satisfy them with artistic excellence



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CURATORIAL PRIORITIES

1. **Prioritize the presentation of our art** over our equity issues
 2. **Promote aesthetics over inclusion** (art over access)
 3. **Use a value-added model:** What is our work adding to your company, programming and audience engagement?
4. **Don't compromise your own artistic vision to be inclusive**
5. **Hook your audiences by flipping the familiar:** Start with a stereotype and turn it on its end, to generate renewed audience interest via a unique perspective on the human condition
6. **Satisfy your audience with aesthetic excellence:** Don't lower your artistic expectations.... don't under-estimate disabled artists