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Where's Queerdo? Disabling Perceptions!

Julie Cosenza

It was the third day of the faculty union strike on the SIU Carbondale campus in fall, 2011. Our strike team was stationed at the corner of Mill and Poplar. The administration was holding out on a contract, making life on campus extremely tense. It was not "business as usual," to use our chancellor's exact phrase. At one moment in the long day of yelling and honking, I found myself on a corner with Ron Pelias, making fun of him for not holding a sign. He argued his presence on the corner and his friendly wave was an effective form of protest. He preferred to lean his sign against a nearby tree. Longing for an academic conversation, being out of the classroom for so long, we started to chat about my performance research. Like most of our conversations, I delight in his ability to listen while my motor mouth excitedly spits out a discombobulated, fragmented cluster of ideas. I periodically check in to see if his facial expression shifts, which is usually my cue to stop talking. When he says "mumm," I listen, for Ron's feedback is often in the form of a carefully constructed question. He hummed and hawed then asked me, "Why are you trying to convince people that you deserve a place at the table? You are sitting at the table. Where are you going to go from here?"

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Where's Queerdo? Disabling Perceptions! is a tour of the maze of higher education through the eyes of a dyslexic graduate student. From systemic to individual, from abstract to literal, this performance strives to make visible the normalized practices and rituals in higher education. What can we learn about the educational system from a queer dyslexic student? What does this mean for other bodies (of knowledge) in the academy that do not "fit in the box"?

This performance is a critical analysis of higher education foregrounding a dyslexic lens as a means of making visible and visceral the systemic disciplining that plays out on what have been falsely marked as non-normative epistemologies and ontolo-

Julie Cosenza is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. *Where's Queerdo? Disabling Perceptions!* explores the intersections of disability and queerness and was first staged (and filmed) on the Marion Kleinau Theatre, SIU campus in March, 2012. The faculty advisor Dr. Elyse Pineau and the assistant director Meggie Mapes provided important artistic insight and much needed support in the process of creating the performance. This publication is dedicated to friend, director, lighting designer, and creative collaborator, the late Rick Jones. It was Rick who suggested the name "Queerdo" for this project, and his amazing lighting design provides just a small glimpse of his passion and talent for lighting the stage. Queerdo is also Julie Cosenza's mime persona and has performed in local Carbondale venues with The V2T2 Cabaret for over three years.

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gies. I argue that the normalized practices in higher education disciplines all the members of the academy, and the effects of this disciplining are hyper-visible in the experiences of dyslexic students. For example, dyslexic students practice "invisible labor," or extra work that goes unrecognized in the academy, usually, but not limited to, the process of acquiring accommodations, working against misrepresentation, and practicing self-advocacy. Dyslexic students are not the only members of the academy that participate in forms of invisible labor. For an academic audience, this performance attempts to denaturalize the structures, procedures, rituals, and normalized practices of the corporate university while simultaneously challenging the underlying ideological assumptions of normalcy and "smartness." This project poses the question: what can we learn about the (higher) educational system from a dyslexic student's experiences and perceptions of education?

Many scholars have published research on the ways in which the academy is an institution that produces dominant notions of "normal" ontologies and epistemologies. However, very few scholars write about the normalizing communication practices from a dyslexic perspective. In their essay, "Remaking (the) Discipline: Marking the Performative Accomplishment of (Dis)Ability," Deanna Fassett and Dana Morella, dyslexic scholar, turn to performance theory to argue that disability is a performative accomplishment. The performative repetition of marking one as "disabled" constitutes identity and reinforces dominant notions of what is "normal" and what is "acceptable" (141). They argue that "Rituals are constitutive: Some tell us we belong in school, that we fit, and others mark us as different or distinct, at best, and as a problem to 'comply with' or 'handle,' at worst" (147). Drawing on de Certeau, Fassett and Morella argue that these academic rituals are strategies, or the manipulation of power, that are in place to maintain order and stability. The academic strategies are deployed through mundane acts of communication in the academy—in classrooms, faculty meetings, in the halls, and in offices—and the ritualistic performances that discipline bodies to "fit in the box."

This performance aims to link my individual dyslexic experience to larger systemic issues that impact everyone in the academy, and by *everyone in the academy*, I am referring to the undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, administration, and staff, particularly academic campus services. In this accompanying essay, I frame my approach from a "betweener" positionality with cognitive disabilities and the privilege of kinesthetic intelligence. In my theoretical section, I discuss policy and the ways in which dyslexia is a systemic issue that is made into an individual issue in higher education. Then, I provide background information on my performance method that combines mime and technology on stage. In the last section, I situate this project in a discussion of my previous performance work. I discuss how *Where's Queerdo?* marks a shift in my personal disability visibility politics, and I elaborate on a more generative approach to disability discourse.

A Betweener Frame

As a person who exists in a liminal space between disability and ablebodiedness, with a cognitive disability and kinesthetic intelligence, I find Marcelo Diversi & Claudio Moreira's text *Betweener Talk: Decolonizing Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, & Praxis* a useful frame for this project. They argue we "are claiming this position, betweener, not to fix our identities but to situate ourselves in the socially constructed, fluid space from which we are writing, thinking, and giving meaning to the experiences represented in this book" (19). I appreciate the fluidity embedded in their notion of betweener. Throughout the text they use performative writing to "show" the value of writing from the betweener space as a place of unique embodied perceptions of the socially constructed worlds in which they inhabit. They go on to explain, "we believe all humans experience this betweenness, although at varying degrees of intensity and cost" (19). I fully support this assertion and read this as an invitation to explore and apply their research on the value of betweener identity and knowledge production.

With humility, respect, and reflexivity, Diversi and Moreira embrace "representational blurriness" (19) as they address the subjects (as intersubjects) of their research on Brazilian street kids. Representational blurriness, for me, refers to the voiceless subjects at the "center" of knowledge production who are being pushed to the "peripheries of sociological meaning-making by hegemonic rules of language use, theoretical sophistication, and representational authority" (21). I associate this practice to the study of dyslexic bodies in the academy. In the field of special education, scholars interrogate the dyslexic body and determine symptoms, diagnosis, and treatments. Dyslexia is the subject of knowledge production, not the means. Most academic discourse on dyslexia is produced from ablebodied researchers in the field of special education with an emphasis on treatment. Knowledge rarely comes from a dyslexic scholar writing about his/her own experiences. This project speaks back to this structure and brings dyslexic perceptions of the educational system to the forefront.

Diversi and Moreira's decolonizing writing methodology exemplifies what I attempt to accomplish in my performance research. They write about their experiences as a means of creating a decolonizing praxis in education. They argue:

> The public performance stage—moving from decolonizing discourse toward decolonizing praxis, toward the dream in which people come to academia to do the talking not just the answering, marking the invasion of the institutional space by the oppressed and marked body, not as object of research but as expert of own struggle. Our text itself is a battleground, where we speak of possibilities in how to do decolonizing scholarship, and where we show it. (28)

Their notion of moving beyond learning the educational theories and strategies but to speak from the betweener space moves the "object" or study from underneath the microscope to a position of knowledge producer. Very few dyslexic scholars are writing about their experiences of being dyslexic in the academy; Dené Granger and Dana Morella are two personally influential dyslexic voices in the field. Diversi and Moreira decolonize the traditional academic discourses by embracing and valuing visceral

knowledge and challenge the western, white, middle class standard of writing. They perform on the page their personal stories to challenge institutional colonization and "show" new possibilities of legitimate knowledge production based in embodied life experiences. Like Diversi and Moreira, my project does not offer reconciliation, an ending, or tidy conclusions to the betweener space; I only offer my experiences, possibilities, and hope of new directions.

In short, writing from the fluid space of the betweener is a decolonizing praxis in the academy. My betweener space of kinesthetic intelligence and cognitive disability may provide important insight on the disciplining aspects of education. I use the stage and the page to "show" the visceral knowledge of my dyslexic body that often is pushed to the periphery and stuck under the microscope of special education to be studied and fixed. The betweener is constantly in flux in a liminal space that works toward a decolonizing praxis by incorporating non-traditional methods of writing and performing from the perspective of the usual subjects (of study).

Individualizing The Systemic

On a Wednesday evening after the introductory pedagogy course and an engaging class discussion of the ways white students resists their white privilege, John T. Warren and I continued the conversation as we walked down the hall of the Communications Building. He was explaining an encounter with a student who continuously attempted to rationalize her whiteness or explain away her privilege during class discussions. He spoke of the challenges in explaining to white students that whiteness functions on a systemic level as opposed to an individual level. He would often say out of frustration (as if he was talking to a student), "It is not about you! Privilege is systemic!" In other words, white students often failed to see past their individuality and recognize racism on a systemic level. We paused at the bottom of the central staircase, and he turned to me and said, "Do you know what is interesting about your research on dyslexia in higher education? Ableism is a systemic problem that is made into an individual issue."

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To reinforce the connections between dyslexia and larger systemic issues, I draw on scholarship in whiteness, critical disability studies in education, crip theory, and critical communication pedagogy. This essay provides background information as a means of making connections between the literature and the staged performance, *Where's Queerdo? Disabling Perceptions!* In the first part of this section, I argue that dyslexia in the academy is a systemic ideological issue that, through policy, is made into an individual issue in terms of self-advocacy.

As a crip queer graduate student at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, it is my responsibility, as an individual student, to access accommodations. Students with severe dyslexia, like me, often (but not always) require accommodations in the form of accessible materials. In her essay "The Necessity of Academic Accommodations for First Year Students with Learning Disabilities," Wanda Hadley claims, "accom-

modations that may assist students with learning disabilities include, but are not limited to, the use of readers, note-takers, extra time to complete exams, course registration, and/or alternate test formats" (10). She goes on to explain that disability accommodations can only be granted through the Disability Service on campus upon receiving a diagnosis. The office provides students "reasonable" accommodations in accordance with their disability documentation. In my case, I use the text conversion lab at the Disability Student Services (DSS) office to convert all reading materials to accessible format. This process includes running texts through Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software in order for my screen reader (on my computer) to read the words on the page aloud while I read them to myself. The screen reader on my computer is named Alex. In this system, teachers are not required to provide materials that are accessible. It is my responsibility to get the materials from faculty and bring them to the lab to be converted. I am not necessarily arguing that teachers should be required to provide accessible materials, although that would be wonderful. I am pointing out a naturalized practice in the academy that contributes to the individualization of dyslexia.

This structure of text conversion and other disability accommodations is informed by policy. Hadley cites the American's with Disabilities Act and describes the repercussions of the system of accommodations:

> In graduating to the higher education environment, students with learning disabilities are assured services by Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). These laws, however, require students to self-advocate—relating to the student's understanding of the disability and being able to articulate reasonable need for academic accommodations (Taylor, Richards, and Brady; 2005)—for academic accommodations and be placed in inclusive classrooms with other college students who do not have learning disabilities, and compete academically (Hadley, 2005). (10)

Hadley describes the shift students with disabilities go through when going from high school to higher education in terms of self-advocacy. In addition to the regular stresses and tasks of college learning, it is the student's responsibility to make sure s/he is getting the accommodations s/he needs in a timely and organized fashion without the support of parents, teachers, special educators, and administrators like in the high school setting. Hadley's description of this process is a perfect example of the ways in which self-advocacy—disclosing, knowing one's impairment, seeking the appropriate accommodations—is a result of policy and the ADA. It is also important to note that I support the ADA and appreciate the institutional awareness it brings to students with disabilities.

I am particularly interested in the effects of policy on the individualization of dyslexia. The ADA requires educational institutions to maintain an office that is responsible for approving and providing accommodations according to diagnoses. One of the effects of this central office system of providing accommodations is that individual students with disabilities must undergo invisible labor. Text conversion accommodations are so time consuming and troublesome to acquire, I find that many dyslexic

students find the process to be more work than reading an inaccessible text. The invisible labor and administrivia outweigh the intended support of the office. Ablebodied privilege is systemic, but, through policy, disability/dyslexia is made into an individual issue.

Ablebodied privilege functions on a systemic level in the academy primarily through the ideological production of "smartness." In their essay, "Smartness as Property: A Critical Exploration of Intersections Between Whiteness and Disability Studies," critical disability scholars Zeus Leonardo and Alicia A. Broderick articulate the intersections between the institutional ideology of whiteness and smartness. They argue that smartness is not an ontological phenomenon, but a social construction, claiming that, "Dominant notions of ability, competence, and intelligence (and their corollaries of inability, incompetence, and mental retardation) are socially constructed and thus are not real (ontologically), objective (epistemologically), or useful (clinically)" (2218). In other words, students are not born smart; they are repeatedly told they are smart by individuals and institutional systems of education. Smartness is an axiological social construction that functions as cultural capital, which I elaborate on later in this section. Parents rarely complain if their child is selected for the "gifted and talented" program, for it is cultural capital, a privilege. Special education or a learning disability label is seen as a hindrance in the competitive world of capitalism. "Smartness" is not an inherent trait; it is an ideological social construction that has market value.

In addition to a social construction, Leonardo and Broderick argue that smartness is systemic and requires an ideological critique, similar to whiteness:

> Likewise, smartness may be socially constructed, but this fact alone does not explain how the relation exists in real and institutional forms. Abdicating the critique to the weak moment of "social construction" (at once helpful and insufficient) does nothing for the stronger moment of ideology critique. Although these differences are not real on the ontological plane, they are real on the existential plane of lived experiences, and we argue that ideological critique is necessary to begin to dissolve these complex systems of oppression. (2219)

Here they mark the material effects of smartness on the body and lived experience. I agree that the differences between a dyslexic's ability and a non-dyslexic's ability are systematically socially constructed. However constructed these differences may be, they absolutely have material effects on dyslexic bodies, and I, too, am calling for an ideological critique of systems of oppression.

A radical paradigm shift is required to destabilize the practices of communication and education we hold sacred in the academy. Dené Granger, a dyslexic scholar, calls for a new way of reading dyslexic writing. As a doctoral student, she does not discipline her writing to fit the normative standards of communication when submitting written assignments. She argues that are many ways of reading texts (and I would add symbols), and the academy needs to learn to adjust to different forms of written communication. In my experience, even the most supportive faculty, who comply with accommodation requests, cannot embrace such a radical shift as to accept a pa-

per with "misspelled" words or creative grammar. Academics enjoy playing with symbols; can a misspelled word (on purpose or accident) be "brilliant"? In their essay, "[Re]claiming 'Inclusive Education' Toward Cohesion in Educational Reform: Disability Studies Unravels the Myth of the Normal Child," Susan Baglieri, Lynne M. Bejoian, Alicia A. Brodrick, David J. Connorand, and Jan Valle also argue that it requires a major ideological paradigm shift to destabilize normative education, for "smartness" and communication "norms" are an intrinsic aspect of education and, more particularly visible in special education.

The ideological (re)production of smartness is inherently connected to the "myth of the normal child." Bagliere et al. discuss the implications of special education labeling on ideological normalcy. They argue:

> This kind of labeling implies the presence of a standard according to which "diverse" and "different" children are gauged; however, it is within special education that cognitive and biological ideologies of normalcy and abnormalcy are codified and exercised—even championed for relentless methods of identifying pathology within schoolchildren in order to deliver "appropriate services." (2129)

Normal is often never identified, but only its opposition "diverse" and "different" are diagnosed and treated. The mythical norm is the "typical" ontology that does not require investigation and is rarely marked. Baglieri et al. argue that the normal child does not exist; however, it is important to consider the ramifications of the myth of the normal child. Special education textbooks specialize in training teachers to identify what deviates from the norm while the norm is never addressed. According to Baglieri et al. special education strives to enforce the notion of normalcy by not only identifying what is "different," but also by treating this difference with appropriate services (2130). The myth of the normal child is not just an early education phenomena; it spans throughout the educational system and compels everyone to strive toward a mythical notion of cognitive ablebodiedness.

Borrowing from crip theory, I formulate a notion of compulsory ablebodiedness that specifically focuses on smartness. Crip theory is a framework for analysis based on the notion that ablebodiedness and heterosexuality are ideologically interwoven or produced congruently through the same social institutions. In his text, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Robert McRuer draws on Judith Butler's notion of performativity to formulate his notion of compulsory ablebodiedness. He notes that identities are constituted through repetitive performances and ablebodiedness, in its impossibility, sets itself up as the origin, the ultimate goal to strive toward (9). The compulsory system only provides the illusion of choice, and in actuality, it is a system where there is no choice (8). I use McRuer's foundation to construct my notion of compulsory cognitive ablebodiedness in education. It is a compulsory system that propels all members of the academy (students, administrators, teachers, staff in campus services) toward the ultimate constructed goal of mythical ablebodied scholar and is a powerful force that works to naturalize ableist procedures, structures, pedagogies, communication, and practices in the academy. An ideological critique of smartness

must consider the performative production of smartness, the repetition of stylized acts in a compulsory system. There is only the *illusion* of choice.

McRuer links compulsory ablebodiedness to larger hegemonic forces informed by capitalism, competition, and consumption. As faculty in English composition, he argues that composition theory is

> not especially concerned with theorizing embodiment and/in the corporate university. Perhaps this is because corporate processes seem to privilege, imagine, and produce only one kind of body on either side of the desk: on one side, the flexible body of the contingent, replaceable instructor; on the other, the flexible body of the student dutifully mastering marketable skills and producing clear, orderly, efficient prose. (148)

"Smartness" is cultural capital and serves a particular purpose in a capitalist economy and a corporate university. I have argued that the myth of the normal child, the compulsory move toward the ablebodied scholar, and the naturalized practices and rituals in education impact *every member of the academy*. McRuer, in his passage above, articulates the influences of the corporate university on both teachers and students. I argue that the marketable skills McRuer mentions is one of the main reasons we, myself included, struggle to support Granger's desire to radically shift our paradigm of "normal," standard written communication. The capitalist ideology in our Western economy and society is alive and well in the classroom. Misspelled words will not get you a job. For example, a misspelled word on your resume is a red flag, for it signifies the inability or lack of knowledge to carefully check your writing.

This debate reminds me of Lisa Delpit's notion of the culture of power. She argues poor children of color must learn the culture of power to access the capitalist economy. Then when in a position of power, one can work from inside the system to make change. She, of course, does not support the system of power in place that is oppressive and moves bodies toward a standard (masculine, white, middle class) mythical norm. I am also critical of the system, but, at this point in time, I must access the culture of power in terms of standard writing to make change within the system. I support Granger's efforts; however, I am not familiar with a publication outlet, a vital avenue of disseminating my performance research, that will accept a paper with non-traditional wording and grammar –perhaps there will be in the future.

In conclusion, there are many avenues to explore dyslexia in the academy, and in this paper, I interrogate the ways in which dyslexia is a systemic ideological issue that, through policy, is made into an individual issue in terms of self-advocacy. The structure of the ADA requires institutions to provide support services for students with disabilities making the accommodation process, which involves disclosure, the responsibility of the student with disabilities. This is the individualization of dyslexia, making a systemic issue into an individual's problem. The ideological production of dyslexia through naming and accommodating what differs from the mythical norm is systemic. The critique of normative ideology is where we start to destabilize interlocking systems of oppression.

Mime As Method

> *Mime is not imitation; it is originality. It is not simply the mastery of certain exercises and illusions; it is the study of the mental, emotional, and spiritual origins of movement, itself.*
> —Tony Montanaro, *Mime Spoken Here*

In *Where's Queerdo? Disabling Perceptions!*, mime and technology work together to create an imaginary world on stage, a place where shape shifting, tap dance, and elements of traditional mime collide with automated voice over, video projection, sound effects, and snap shots. In this section, I situate my mime technique by briefly tracing the roots of mime illusions and costuming. Borrowing my colleague Meggie Mapes' notion of shape shifting, I discuss my alter ego Queerdo. Due to dyslexia, I often find that communication fails me, and I use my kinesthetic intelligence to communicate my research on the stage. Additionally, I make the connection between the process of creating a staged performance and the process of acquiring accommodations. I argue that technology on stage mixed with the physicality of mime is conducive to my dyslexic form of communication and theoretically challenges audiences' perceptions of systemic education and ablebodiedness.

Drawing from the French and Polish schools of mime, I use Etienne Decroux's (the "father of modern mime") notion of mime illusions. Decroux, Marcel Marceau's master mime, is credited in Western historical accounts for creating the concept of the mime illusion and many of the common illusions we use today, according to Tony Montanaro, one of Marceau and Decroux's pupils (Montanaro 18-19). A mime illusion refers to the specific movement that indicates an action or object. For example, some of the most common illusions in mime are the many leans, the wall, the ledge, the tight rope, and of course, the box. In her text, *All About Mime*, Maravene Sheppard Loeschke explains that mime illusions can be used as literal or abstract (6-7). For example, in a literal mime piece, if the mime is doing the ladder illusion, she is literally climbing the ladder –probably to walk on a tight rope or swing from a trapeze. In abstract mime, the illusions have metaphoric meaning. For example, in undergraduate school, I choreographed a duet called "The Glass Ceiling" where we (my male mime partner and I) used the ladder illusion to signify climbing the corporate ladder. When I lifted a heavy rock, it signified the heavy lifting women are required to perform in the corporate world (for less pay than their male counterparts). In *Where's Queerdo?*, my illusions are informed by the French school of mime and are abstract.

My mime style falls somewhere between silent mime and the lesser known version of mime where the mime uses both vocal and physical communication. According to Montanaro, mime was originally a form of story telling where the actor used all parts of her body, including her voice. Marceau made famous the silent form of mime where the mime does not vocalize words; however silent mimes may make sound effects, for example, the bee sound as it swooms by the face. Montanaro supports the more traditional version of mime, which resembles the Italian school of mime that

stemmed from Commedia Del Arte, where the mime performer uses her voice and her body to articulate her story. Montanaro encourages contemporary mimes to explore the many venues of self-expression in the art of mime (21). Taking his lead, I use the silent form of mime, but I also use the screen to project images, phrases, and quotes to explore my "voice." Many forms of modern mime, including Marceau's work, include recorded sound effects that accompany actions on stage. I also use sound effects and voice over to tell my story; however, I never physically speak on stage. This was a conscious choice to accentuate my visceral knowledge (in addition to my inability to memorize words).

The character "Queerdo" is a shape shifting entity that can take on the characteristics of people, objects, systems, abstract concepts, and so on. I refer to the character on stage, played by me, as Queerdo, my alter ego. The notion of the alter ego is common in the French school of mime, and was made popular by Marcel Marceau's famous alter ego "Bip." I am particularly interested in utilizing an alter ego (similar to a performance persona) due to the endless possibilities of a blank-slate character that is not defined by my situated knowledge or identity. Of course, Queerdo is informed by my life experiences, but the separation between Queerdo and me provides a freedom to use my body to mean different things at different times. Additionally, using an alter ego provides a safe distance between the content and me, both in the writing and the performance process. Also, when I am creating performance, I envision the stage—what the lights look like, what is on the screen, and where the performer is standing on stage—and create the performance from the audience looking at the stage. In my process, I am situated very specifically as the creator looking at the stage and not the character on stage. In my creative mind, I can see my alter ego performing on stage.

As a dyslexic scholar, I often experience the failure of traditional language in my everyday communications, and I prefer to use my kinesthetic intelligence to communicate and process the world around me. Like many people with dyslexia, I use an artistic medium to express myself due to the shortcomings of language and words. In verbal, non-verbal, and written everyday communications, I often struggle to articulate myself and tend to misunderstand input or create "unique" meanings. For me, staged performance is a site of embodied research, where my arguments dance and my thesis comes to life. Performance allows me to work with many modalities at once to provide a layered understanding through collage, comparison, and juxtaposition. For me, performance research is my attempt to communicate my (dyslexic) experiences as a means of disrupting or denaturalizing perceptions of the norm.

However, even with all the layered and intertextual meanings imbedded in performance, I find it difficult to communicate certain aspects of my dyslexic experiences. As I mention in the performance, my father and I have a unique form of communication that is more about the words that are not there, then what is actually spoken. This is not simply nonverbal communication. It is an ineffable communication style beyond the constructs of words. The betweener in me has a love/hate relationship with this (in)ability to perform legible communication.

As a dyslexic scholar who endured years of special education, remedial tutors, and seemingly useless doctor visits, I am in the process of learning to value my different ways of knowing/being in the world. Granted these different ontologies and epistemologies are "different" mainly due to the institutional and individuals who mark them different from the mythical norm. In their discussion of the social construction of "smartness" Leonardo and Broderick argue:

> Admittedly, people's need to assert their intellectual competence is hardly surprising and is quite understandable in the face of their experience first of having been regarded and oppressively treated as "mentally retarded" for years, sometimes decades, and subsequently of having professionals continue to doubt their competence even after they have finally gained independent access to a sophisticated system of augmentative or alternative communication. In some ways, it is difficult to understand the vehemence and vitriol with which some professionals have continued to deride many of these individuals as "retarded," failing to even grudgingly admit to the ideologically conservative interpretation of these individuals' experiences as "exceptions" to the rule. (2220-1)

I am particularly drawn to this passage due to the underlying current of resistance, a resistance grounded in a sophisticated system of alternative communication. I find it almost liberating to redirect the failings to the professional interpretations from what I perceived to be my failures. I have come to believe that my "exception" is the art of mime.

Queerdo's costume incorporates a traditional mime element with a contemporary touch of style. Montanaro argues that every mime is unique with his or her own recognizable costume and performance traits (22). Queerdo is dressed in long black yoga pants tight around the waist and thighs. Queerdo's black fedora with a gray band is inspired by Bip's top hat with a red flower. Marceau used this hat to signify that he was his alter ego, Bip. Queerdo's shirt is a ribbed long tight tank top and has thick (2 inch) black painted stripes running horizontally that consist of words. The paint is not meant to be perfect; it supposed to look a little messy. The words spray-painted on the shirt (that make up the black stripes) are the descriptions that Queerdo has encountered over the years, for example, retard, smart, queer, crip, invisible, dyke. The shirt is an important part of the production due to the process I went through to make it, as described in the silent film on the invisible labor in the academy. I documented (video and pictures) many aspects of my creative process, for I believe that process is important to someone who has a processing disability.

This project attempts to illuminate a form of invisible labor in the academy, which is often important work that happens behind the scenes and receives minimal recognition or credit. *Where's Queerdo?* specifically points to the connection between disability accommodations and the invisible labor of performance production. The "place" of the SIU campus is very important to this project with the term *place* referring to interactions with people and structural artifacts in a specific time period. In the invisible labor accommodations film, Queerdo walks through Woody Hall to the DSS office. Woody Hall is also home to the graduate school office, the financial aid office,

the bursar, registration, and many other important offices. When students are directed from office to office, usually due to financial aid problems, we call this process the Woody Shuffle. It is safe to say that many, if not all, students at SIU have done the Woody Shuffle at least once in their career at the University.

Finally, it is vital to recognize the benefits of technology on stage and the intrinsic connections between technology and disability. I often conceive of myself as a cyborg-like student due to the assistance I receive with reading text; my screen reader, Alex, is an important extension of my human body. I also depend on many computerized features such as spell check for written communication (that is when spell check can even recognize my attempts to spell a word). In her text, *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on the Edge*, Petra Kuppers includes an entire chapter on new technologies and embodiment. She cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the embodied nature of vision in relation to technologies. He constructs the cyborg being, "The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become as area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight" (Merleau-Ponty quoted in Kuppers, 106). Alex functions in a similar way, as an extension of my reading ability and experience. Kuppers describes a notion of "touch" through technologies that is not based on literal touching (skin to object), but predicated on a new way of interacting with the world. While the blind man walks he waves his cane from right to left as a touch that provides horizontal vision, a new way of seeing. I choose to use Alex, for he provides a deeper understanding of written texts.

In conclusion, as a dyslexic scholar, I have experienced the failures of traditional language and ineffable communication. I depend on my kinesthetic intelligence and my ability to physically create a new world through mime and technology to communicate my dyslexic perceptions of the world. Mime allows me to shape shift and take the embodied leap into new possibilities, opening up spaces for ontologies and epistemologies that have been deemed "different." Technology on stage allows me to share my cyborg existence. This method of challenging normative ideologies allows me to embrace my stigmatized ways of being and reflects a form of dyslexic communication. Mime mixed with technology on stage is my method of choice due to its potential for expanding and challenging perceptions, perceptions of ablebodiedness, the academic system, the dyslexic experience, hope, and the necessity of pedagogy.

A Generative Turn

Where's Queerdo? marks a shift in my disability politics and my approach to performance as a means of expression. I recently presented a paper at the National Communication Association convention, in New Orleans, 2011, on my Disability Visibility Politics. One aspect of this politic is to embrace a shift in my performance messaging. In my first Spotlight Hour performance at SIU, I performed a dance of public disability disclosure, and I tried to prove (the severity of) my disability by displaying/video projecting sections of my dyslexia diagnosis documentation on the large screen. In a

production directed by Ron Pelias, *Leaning: Personal Stories of Relationships*, I staged my experience with the word *retard*, and I tried to prove that exclusionary education and the experiences of being dyslexic had a profound effect on my self-concept as a student. In "Breaking the Spine," my 2012 Spotlight Hour performance, I staged the effects of the invisible labor on my body, angrily ripping apart a book, throwing it at the wall, and shamefully picking up the pieces pages. In these performances, I was trying to prove that dyslexia is an important factor in my development and worth researching. I was asking for a place at the table, acceptance in the academy. I am tired of trying to prove my authenticity, to provide reasons why I am researching and staging dyslexia scholarship.

In my future scholarship and *Where's Queerdo?*, I am no longer asking for a place at the table, and I am done justifying my research or proving my disability. I am now saying, I am a dyslexic scholar, among many, we are at the table, and here is what you can learn from us. Here is what you can learn about the educational system from dyslexic experiences. Dyslexic bodies (along with other types of bodies) are where the confining traditional structures, the engrained procedures, the unwritten rules, and the naturalized habits of learning and teaching become visible. Actually, they become hyper visible through stories of experiences, through the shuffle of accommodations, the tap dance of identity, the misreadings, the misspellings, the misunderstandings, or the ruptures in the "natural" repetition of education. We are no longer asking for a place at the table, we are here, and this is what you can learn from us.

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The first time I met Scott Gust was at Kathy Hytten's house in Carbondale, IL. Someone asked me about my research, and I mentioned the title of my MA culminating project, The Turtle Walker: Staging Disability, Crip, and Queer Theory. *Scott perked up when he recognized the title remembering he read the "SLOW" piece I published in* Liminalities. *He offered some constructive critiques to the disciplinary issues I was experiencing in the Borderlands of disability and ablebodiedness (what I now call the Betweener space). When I first started researching I felt learning disabilities were excluded from disability studies and problematically addressed as something to fix from the perspective of mainstream special education discourse. He explained that no one quite knows what to do with the learning disability phenomenon. With its ablebodied privilege and its socially constructed stigma, where does it fall in this disciplinary maze? He impressed upon me two important things to ponder as I continue to write from/in this space: 1) it is always about policy and everything we write should consider government policy and/or institutional policy, and 2) try to get other like-minded people onboard with your arguments. He started to get quite animated when he explained that disability scholars are my audience; you do not want to alienate your audience. Think about how you can not only get disability studies to consider learning disabilities, but also critical scholars writing in whiteness, queer theory, feminism, critical communication pedagogy, etc. He especially caught my attention when he said that many bodies battle against the constraints of the educational system, and non-normative bodies are pushed to the front lines. If you look carefully, the gruesome effects of the war are hyper visible on the bodies of students with dyslexia.*

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