Co-Creating *Cripping*: A Performance Ethnographic Research Project as Undergraduate Pedagogy

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Abstract: Cripping *was produced within an undergraduate applied learning class that focused on the development of empathy and understanding through embodying difference during the Fall Semester of 2012. The interviews are from Julie-Ann Scott's dissertation that focused on physically disabled identity as performance in the workplace. The accompanying essay reflects back on the pedagogical, political and artistic complexities of creating a performance ethnographic research film for general audiences within an undergraduate applied learning course.*

Cripping is the culmination of a nine-year project. It began as an interdisciplinary dissertation in Communication Studies and Performance Studies that fo-

<http://liminalities.net/11-4/cripping.pdf>

cused on personal narratives as performance of identity, disability culture, and professionalism. A production was nowhere in the proposal. However, 26 open-ended interviews, a 302-page dissertation, eight short performances, and seven research articles later, the project still felt "undone." People kept asking – audience members at the dissertation defense, conference presentations and guest lectures, anonymous article reviewers, even potential students and colleagues at prospective job interviews—"Is this going to be a show?" In 2010, when Julie-Ann accepted a position at the University of North Carolina Wilmington that had a performance studies colleague with extensive directing experience (Frank), and an accomplished video production professor (Bill), she started to answer, "Yes." Through collaboration it was possible to create a video that traced the complex co-creation of physically disabled identity in daily performance as personally embodied and culturally political through an advanced undergraduate course at a level that warranted publication and distribution.

This essay maps the journey from narrative performance research to performance ethnography and pedagogy, highlighting struggles over script creation, student casting, directing, pedagogical goals, and artistic decisions situated in cultural struggles over marginalized bodies. We will draw upon elements of performance pedagogy, performance ethnography, autoethnography and disability politics throughout this reflection as we grapple with a co-creation involving multiple stakeholders of this project: the research participants, the actors, the directors, the institutions that made the work possible and potential audiences which we hope include you. The following narrative moves back and forth between the voices of three professors/directors of this project: Julie-Ann and Bill discuss script composition, Julie-Ann comments on casting decisions, Julie-Ann and Frank reflect on directing, and Bill and Julie-Ann offer perspectives on oversight of student editing. The final thoughts are a collective effort. Through this joint reflection, we look at how *Cripping* came to be, what we're excited about, what we may have done differently in hindsight, and what we may do next as we explore future projects.

We write this essay in order to enhance viewings of the video, inviting audience members to enter into dialogue over the co-creation of performance art through undergraduate course design that draws audiences in beyond the page and the embodied, face-to-face encounters with all the messiness that entails. Through getting to know us and following the year-long development of this 55-minute film through our reflections, we look forward to the potential conversations that may ensue. In addition to responding to *Cripping* as a production, we hope that through reading this essay, ". . . audience members [will be] anxious to tell [us] about their own experiences. . ." that our reflections with the video will ". . . generate meaning, ideas, memory in their own lives that they [will] want to share" and that can perhaps inform both ours and others' future endeavors into performance ethnography, pedagogy, and multimedia disability representations (Spry, 249).

Writing the Script: Figuring Out What Evokes Response and What is Complete

Julie-Ann: The Chapters of Emergent Research

Upon my first open-ended coding, I presented three empirical chapter topics to my dissertation advisor Kristin Langellier: The Performance of Professionalism, the Performance of Disabled Embodiment, and the Performance of Gender/Private Identity. A year later, we decided to add a fourth data chapter that would note the remaining gaps, the voices that seemed to talk to one another even though they had never met. To create this final chapter, I interweaved participants' words into what I termed, "performance conversations" in relation to the three topics that made up the dissertation focusing heavily on lines from the interviews that stayed with me, even if the previous chapters did not emphasize their significance. Before each series of conversations I included my own stream of consciousness thoughts of the larger project's topics through a series of connected phrases. While my home university audience enjoyed my slam poetry style delivery of these 'short conversations,' this was the only chapter not selected for presentation at the National Communication Association while the other three earned top paper awards. Reviewers collectively said it did not read like a full manuscript. I realized that chapter six could not be published as it was. However, by this time I had received a job offer and I knew that I had future colleagues that could perhaps help turn chapter six into at least part of a staged production, though I was not sure exactly how. It took a few years, and a few more presentations and articles to figure that out.

As I continued to present 15-minute short performances of the narratives on my home campus, at job interviews, and at conferences, I started to take note of which narrative excerpts from the other three chapters elicited the strongest responses from audiences, spurring questions like "What happened to her?" or "I share that feeling." or "I just can't stop thinking about that story." I also made notes of the emails and conversations that emerged from responses to the published articles. After a few years I felt confident selecting certain interview excerpts to include between the conversations, fleshing out the script into an hour-long performance that could potentially be useful in teaching performance studies, disability studies, and the politics surrounding embodiment. That's when I met with Bill to talk about a potential video featuring student actors in the coming semester.

Bill: What Exactly is Performance Ethnography?

My first thought when Julie-Ann approached me about this project was: This is

different from anything I've done. I've experienced ethnographic interviewing but not *performance* ethnography. As Julie-Ann described it, I found it necessary to explore more deeply exactly what the project hoped to capture. At first glance the project seemed part documentary, part narrative drama, part qualitative research, which is exactly what it turned out to be. I gave Julie-Ann the "okay" to approach the chair of our department about adding a special topics course to the schedule, which meant us committing to shooting a 60-minute film with 6-10 student actors in about 4 months time as an extra course for both of us. This schedule was ambitious, but doable. With that, conversation resumed in August of the following year.

Balancing Nonliteral yet Unproblematic Embodiment: Casting and Directing the Able and Dominantly Beautiful as Representations of the Other

Julie-Ann: Casting with Pedagogical and Artistic Goals

By the end of Spring Semester 2012 I identified several students with the talent and interest in embodying the characters from my interviews to film a performance ethnographic video. In both a 200-level Storytelling class and a 400-level Performance Ethnography class, I had focused on the potential for actors to embody multiple characters relying largely on examples from Anna Deveare Smith and E. Patrick Johnson. In order to promote coherence between the courses, I decided to offer a small special topics course as an overload that required instructor permission and invited eight students to participate, six of which immediately enrolled.

I initially intended to cast all 26 characters with the six student actors, confident the students enrolled could successfully perform multiple characters, but word got out about the class and three additional students I had not initially considered asked me if they could enroll. Two of the students I simply had not asked because I had not seen enough of them on stage (both were currently enrolled in a lower-level performance class). However, with a few cold reading auditions in addition to their past projects I was comfortable casting them. The third student presented a bit more of dilemma. I knew of the student's overall talent and had been very impressed by his ability to create characters from interviews in a lower-level performance class, but found him challenging to work with, both resistant to direction and overall lacking in the ability to empathize with others. He seemed suspicious and cynical. As a director I found him exhausting, but I was particularly concerned given *Cripping's* pedagogical goals of understanding disability political and culturally relational rather than simply a personal experience of some unlucky bodies. I was unsure if he would be able to see how positioning disability as simply and self-evidently deficient leads to a systematic discrimination of some bodies which is a collective rather than per-

sonal issue, given that this conversation did not go well with him in regards to race and gender in previous courses. The pervasiveness of the medical model and compulsory able-bodiedness positioned re-conceptualizing disability as potentially even more challenging (Kafer).

After some thought and review of his past work, I granted him permission to enroll. After all, I had shifted the emphasis of the project to pedagogical and performance goals, and the students were expected to acquire the learning objectives listed in this course description, which included both on screen character portrayal and ability to understand the marginality of disabled bodies as a social justice issue. Since he excelled at one of these, we could focus working on the other. As I finalized the cast at the end of the Spring semester, I met with Bill about the film. He had some great questions, to which with time we found answers.

Bill: What is this going to look like?

My first question was how to literally and accurately portray the nuances of each person's specific disability? Will it be most appropriate to film these performances in authentic *field* locations such as homes, apartments and offices to reflect the real interviewee's life? Will we have access to accurate assistive technologies that honestly reflect those used by the interviewees? To what degree will we go to portray the visual appearance and age of each interviewee? To whom will each performer be directing their comments – an anonymous off-camera interviewer or directly toward the camera, and therefore directly to the viewer?

Each of these production concerns was amplified by a number of ancillary but important factors. First, the production was limited by a relatively short shooting timeframe. All of the student performers were enrolled in a one-semester special topics course meaning that all 26 characters, along with numerous narrator segments, would need to be completed within the semester. Second, the substantial number of scripted parts increased the importance of efficiency regarding production issues. Third, access to the appropriate assistive technology for one character would require that the team acquire the same for each character. At first we explored re-creating the disabilities and settings of the participants, but that brought up some challenges both financially and ethically. The financial ones could possibly have been overcome through an applied performance learning budget given to the department by the college, but ethically this became more complicated. Petra Kuppers states that performance activist work surrounding disability strives to create uncertainties surrounding the dominant medical model of disability from the health community, working to unsettle and problematize categories of difference. Given the actor demographics we were not sure if literal re-creations of the disabilities through costuming and props would reify or unsettle categories of difference.

Julie-Ann: The Dilemma of the Dominant Portraying the Marginal

Our institution is located in a tourist beach town without much physical diversity, with the Communication Studies Department being a particularly homogenous bunch when it comes to appearance. This meant that the characters would be portrayed by attractive, seemingly athletic, thin, young, white actors. In short, a film about atypical, stigmatized embodiment was going to be represented largely by those who enjoyed the privilege of being members of the U.S culture's 'classically beautiful' population. At first, as Bill noted above, we discussed the possibility of using wigs, makeup, and disability aid devices to alter the appearance of ages and ability, (all participants in the initial study self-identified as white as did all the students available for the project, so race did not factor in to any conversations). With time, we realized that "while the corporeal allusion to flesh, becoming, and embodiment is at the heart of ethnographic performance" any literal representations of the characters felt uncomfortable and unnecessary (Carver and Alexander, 188). The students needed to access these participants' experiences and find a place of empathy and respect through embodiment, but that did not require a wig or costume. In fact, such a decision could be seen as appropriation of the participants' experience by able-bodied actors for a largely able-bodied audience. In addition, I had promised confidentiality to my participants, and I did not want to risk any literal signifiers to 'out' their identities. Instead, I directed students not to move more than the character was capable during their monologues, and to attend to their gestures and speech pattern as I described.

While I shied away from extensive costumes, I did take appearance into account for characters that talked about certain physical attributes they identified as important to their senses of self. I cast a man proud of his height with my tallest actor, a woman proud of her Jewish looks and heritage with my one olive skinned, stronger featured actor, and two women who drew attention to their blonde hair during the interview with two blonde actors. Beyond that, I thought about speech pattern, what I knew of the students' past performance successes, and my students' abilities to empathize with difference (I tried to cast students who I knew had sensitivity to difference and would more readily achieve empathy and understandings of disability-based discrimination in monologues that were complex and often received mixed responses from audiences). Initially, I had no intention of playing any of the characters but that plan changed, as I'll explain later. Before we began directing we needed to decide how the script would translate to the screen in order to prepare the actors for the final filming. Bill, taking in consideration the script and film aesthetics came up with a basic plan.

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Bill: Authenticity in Abstraction

In short, the focus of the production would be on capturing the most authentic performances possible within a minimalist production setting. In practical terms this meant that we would shoot the segments in our television studio with varied lighting backgrounds for each performer. Student actors would dress in a way that suggested the authenticity of their character but make-up and additional accouterments would be kept to a minimum. Since we decided to avoid including assistive devices, we decided that a speaker's specific disability would be noted with a title at the beginning of each monologue. Finally, we agreed that having the performers present directly to the camera would enhance the intensity of the performance ethnography element of the production. Viewers of the finished production would be more effectively engaged in each performer's story rather than feel as though they were watching, in a more detached fashion, a documentary about the subject. By having the performers speak directly to the audience we hoped that the film would spur cultural members to be "less able to retreat into the privacy of our own limited self-serving thinking, our stereotypes, and biases" (Jones, 344). Through more engaged participation in the performer's narrative as the primary audience we hoped to compel the audience, "to acknowledge the validity of another viewpoint, because it is living right there in front of us," addressing the audience as they had addressed Julie-Ann (Jones, 344).

Julie-Ann: Caught between Bodies in Performance Ethnography

With these decisions in mind, I finalized learning objectives, selected readings on performance ethnography and disability and scheduled initial one-on-one meetings to introduce my students to the characters and vision for the film. However, I realized the complications involved in guiding the students' character development about a week before I began directing. Because my IRB had stated that the audio recordings would not be shared with anyone besides my dissertation advisor I could only share written transcriptions with the students. The University of Maine would not consider a revision to a completed project IRB so I was faced with the difficult task of describing the characters to my students as I remembered them as opposed to letting them hear their voices.

Learning this, I worried about the ethics of the project, as Dwight Conquergood articulates, "Ethnography is an *embodied practice;* it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. The embodied researcher is the instrument" (352). My students did not know these people like I did; they had not sat face-to-face, continued email and in-person relationships, and listened to their voices over and over again in an effort to know them through performance transcription and embodiment. Now, they could not even access their voices. The script was just another script, the characters were not close to them; without audio evidence of

their existence they may not even seem like "real" people. My goal of empathy with difference as a shared, and integral part of embodied humanity seemed to be further complicated and far-reaching. Could these students involved ever "claim crip . . . as a way of acknowledging that we all have bodies and minds with shifting abilities, and wrestling with the political meanings and histories of such shifts?"(Kafer, 13). I had named the film *Cripping* with the goal for actors and audiences to re-understand disability through entering into a conversation and shift their able-biased gaze guided by the words deemed important by disabled people, but now that seemed potentially overreaching.

As I prepared for directing, I felt haunted by Soyini Madison's instruction that "performance demands that the researcher's body must be contemporally present and active in a dialogical meeting with the Other. This is co-performance" (Rethinking Ethnography, p. 348). While I felt extremely connected to the participants of the project, the co-performance was turning into a game of telephone: me describing a voice, a mannerism, an essence and the student interpreting that through her/his own body and performing it back for my approval, all while attending to the dynamics of ability based-discrimination each participant navigated. I felt caught between bodies, desiring to allow my students the freedom to perform a character through their bodies and not wanting to misrepresent the bodies through which the script emerged.

I stopped early on attempting to provide enough verbal instruction or performing the monologue myself as an example. I realized that it was impossible for my students to mirror Anna Deveare's process of listening to the participant over and over again, and becoming them (Rose). They were not the performance scholars who began this project, and in turn were not "immersed in the cosubject" like I was (Pollock, 326). I realized this process was a joint endeavor, that our unique co-creation involved multiple bodies and subjectivities. Through the project, theirs, mine, and my co-directors could bleed into one another, immersed with the participants whose words made up the script. Together we could create something that was not any one of us but a new co-creation as we began disappearing as individuals into a new "field's body;" this field being the multimedia space of *Cripping* (Pollock, 326).

With this understanding I began to feel more at ease and embraced the project as an artistic performance endeavor with real ethical implications, seeing the performance process as "a synthesis of aesthetic and epistemic goals: of both knowing and enjoying" with the understanding that "too much emphasis on one runs the risk of losing the magic middle where the act of interpretation comes to life as a unique phenomena in its own right" (LeVan, citing Bacon 212). *Cripping* was its own cultural performance apart from the interviews and larger project, a co-constitution of multiple meanings and understandings surrounding ability and identity.

I met with the student actors at length one-on-one twice a week, talking to them about the project, asking them to apply the assigned readings on perfor-

mance ethnography, including published articles from the project to their characters. We talked about the complete interviews, the characters' histories, and my memories from the interactions. The focus came on portraying their emotions, goals, and overall spirits as I remembered them informed by how the student interpreted the interview text through their own experiences and bodies. We spoke about their speech patterns, facial expressions, and body language in relation to the perceived emotions driving the narrative. The students practiced gesturing in relation to their characters' physical abilities, developing empathy and "loving perception" of who the character was and the situation the monologue emerged from in relation to themselves (Lugones cited in Madison, Critical Ethnography). Overall this process was enjoyable. I watched people I'd spent years with via their recorded interviews meld with students I directed, creating a new co-performance of physically disabled identity that united bodies marked by difference with those who experienced dominant privilege.

Some student performances sent chills through me as I heard a voice so close to the participant's, coming from a young able body. Others did not access the participant in a way that spawned a déjà vu sensation, but instead captured the emotion of the monologue as I interpreted it, re-creating the emotions, struggles, demeanor, and intent, even if was through a different body and voice. Subtleties like hairstyles, clothes that nodded to the character's" age, style, and profession without being too literal, enhanced the co-creation of performance ethnographic voice. Throughout this process I was very fortunate to have Frank there to help co-direct students, particularly those who I worried about with regard to the relationship of the participant, actor, and character. Bringing in an accomplished director more distant from the script allowed me to see and interpret the monologue as a new co-creation rather than simply a re-citation of the interview from which it emerged.

Frank: Bringing Past Experience and Perspective to a New Endeavor

As a communication/performance studies professor, my scholarship includes stage and screen producing, writing, directing, acting and instructional design. *Cripping* provided a rare, remarkable opportunity to serve as an associate director. My first undergraduate major was chemistry (with a biology minor) on a pre-med track toward a career as a physician. I was (and still am) fascinated by science and math. Alas, other interests and urges steered my education and professional pursuits in a different direction. Fortunately, I've had the opportunity to develop or contribute to several creative stage and screen projects based on health education and the challenges faced by special populations. Such work brings unique satisfaction, feeding an array of passions as well as professional/personal development goals. One highlight of a past project involved partnership with Bill. I was confident that *Cripping* collaboration with Julie-Ann and again with Bill would prove quite satisfying as well. The chance to work

with students on a script of this nature was especially enticing. I had not previously taught or directed any of the performers nor was I involved in the casting. As such, the context required building trust with the actors and provided the exhilaration of co-constructing personae and "moments" in conjunction with each performer and faculty colleagues.

Julie-Ann: The Multi-Directing of a Challenging Actor/Student

One particular student, the one I was anxious over casting in the first place, did not feel capable of developing his two monologues without a voice to mimic. No amount of description seemed adequate, and he refused to move forward without a voice to copy. Remembering his ear, and ability to create a character through this process I found two different men (Bill and a colleague's partner that had voices and demeanors that complimented the participants') and had each read the monologue into a recorder. This gave the student a starting point to begin rehearsals. His resistance continued, first becoming angry at any direction, arguing that he felt he was already portraying the emotion or voice variation I requested. As tension ensued I was relieved to call upon Frank for help co-directing the student as I had with others who I felt needed a second communicator to help them access the emotion, place, and drive of the character.

Frank: Coming in as a Private Coach for Challenging Players

Julie-Ann invited me to coach some performers prior to her next sessions with them (which I was also invited to attend). In each case, based on rehearsals, she noted the strengths of each portrayal to date along with general character features, and performance dimensions of specific script passages, she felt needed the most attention. She explained that some performers were "on track" and, as such, did not require my services as a private coach. I was, however, encouraged to offer reactions and suggestions to all of the actors during recording sessions.

Performers were not required, nor encouraged, to "impersonate" participants. Instead, for each character, Julie-Ann identified a few primary rhetorical objectives, personality traits, physical dimensions and vocal features. As added benefit, she offered background information on each character, for instance, what led to their physical condition and her perspective (based on the totality of a given interview) on what seemed to compel the interviewee to share such a personal, powerful testimonial. With this understanding we could work collectively to achieve an authentic monologue performance without mimicking the actual encounter from which it emerged.

Julie-Ann: Finding an Empathetic Performance…even without Empathy.

The meeting with Frank went very well and the student left with strong skeletons to flesh out his characters upon. That said, a week later he came to me asking to modify or throw out a particular monologue, saying he had spoken to his roommate's father who had a similar occupation to the participant and based on his "investigation" he had decided that the interviewee was "lying" about his workload and accomplishments. This spawned a long conversation about respect, empathy, and loving perception, and the responsibility of the performer to access experience, identify, and communicate, not critique the character. We returned to Soyini Madison's definition of arrogant versus loving perception, reminding him that through agreeing to act in a performance ethnography he needed to guard against "arrogant perception" that compels one to "stand at a distance in opposition to an egalitarian relationship, thereby prohibiting any consideration for honest dialogue" (122). After an hour he agreed that he could accept the character's memories as his own, a reality as valid as any other. This acquiescing may have come due to his desire to remain in the class, add to his senior portfolio, and receive a desired grade. That said, with the help of Frank at his remaining rehearsals, all of his characters were included in the film in their entirety whether he ever actually achieved loving perception or just learned not to disclose his suspicions or conclusions to the directors/professors. With Frank's thoughtful, distinguished demeanor and perception, challenging characters were overall successfully prepared (whether that challenge came from a student's struggles as performer or struggles as a cultural member uncomfortable with difference—sometimes both). With a lot of excitement and some trepidation, we took to the studio.

It is vital to not position all struggles for empathy to be located in one, difficult student. Able-bias is much more pervasive. Pushing students to empathize beyond individual experience to disability as a social justice issue in need of political activism like other identity groups was difficult for even my most sensitive students to comprehend. Working to understand their fears of disability and discomfort with the characters' experience as anxiety a symptom of what Robert McRuer describes as compulsory able-bodiedness—a pervasive cultural ideology that positions the disabled body as deviant, a disruption of the 'natural order of things' rather than an inevitability of being human—was an ongoing struggle throughout the semester. They read articles I published from these narratives that focused on how being marked by the cultural stigma of disability fosters a "hyper-embodied" experience in which individuals are aware of the inevitable vulnerability of all human bodies and that it is our fear of this vulnerability that compels us to marginalize certain bodies.[1] In each conversation I

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[1] See Scott, J.A. (2012). Performing hyperembodiment: Stories of and through physically disabled bodies. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 32*(2), 100-120; Scott, J.A. (2012).

used the example of how if an expectant mother were to say, "I don't care about the ability level of this child as long as it is not Black, gay, or female" they would be shocked in ways that they would not be if she said, "I don't care as long as it's healthy," which is a paraphrase of a phrase used by the participant Ingrid during her interview. Assigned journals indicated that students understood disability as politically, not just viscerally present in culture over the course of the semester. I cannot say that their understandings were completely and forever altered, but they were able to articulate the new frame in new more complex ways in ongoing reflections.

Filming: The Technical, Embodied Performance-Making Process

Bill: The Nuts and Bolts of Multimedia Performance

Six weeks into the semester, *Cripping* filming began in earnest. I decided to film using a Canon 60D DSLR camera at 24 high definition (HD) frames per second (fps). This camera and frame rate yield an exceptional *filmic* picture quality that would create a rather soft, saturated visual feel to the images. Rather than looking like traditional broadcast *TV*, the softer image would communicate a more cinematic, permanent visual appeal. The audio would be gathered using a shotgun microphone mounted on a boom microphone stand and recorded directly into the camera. Two sound baffles would reduce the room reverb and enable more realistic and *present* monologue recording.

Julie-Ann, acting as producer and talent director, coordinated talent and crew schedules to afford uninterrupted two- to five-hour shooting sessions. Most shooting sessions followed a similar pattern: 45-minute set-up of lighting, camera and sound equipment, recording of interviewee monologues and single-line statements, and 30-minutes to take down and reset the studio. Filming sessions varied ranging from one to four per session.

The original script was broken down into shooting segments, each including an interviewee's monologue and individual spoken lines. To keep the numerous clips organized a shooting log was recorded and each shot was *slated* using a film clapboard with the character name, script page number and line number noted on a clapboard.

As the director of photography my primary concern was capturing performer images as cleanly as possible. Studio key and fill lights were adjusted to yield an acceptable foundation of lighting on the performer's face while leaving

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"Cripped" Heroes: An analysis of physically disabled professionals' personal narratives as performance of identity. *Southern Communication Journal, 77*(4), 307-328; and Scott, J.A. (2012). Performing post-Accident professional identity in personal narrative: Grappling with embodied vulnerability. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies, 8*(3), 1-22.

some shadow to yield a *realistic* lighting scenario. Colored backlights were used to create a rim light highlighting the performer's shoulders and hair, effectively separating each from the non-descript background. The white studio back wall was flooded with a single color of light and highlighted with soft shapes of different colored light. The goal of this lighting scheme, as mentioned above, was to create a neutral or non-descript performance space that highlighted the actor's face, delivery, vocal inflection and posture. The intent of the *generic* background was to avoid visual distraction and encourage viewers to focus on the participant as though they were engaged in conversation.

To portray the actors in a positive, somewhat dominant view, the camera was kept at or just below eye level. The actors were generally framed from close medium-shot to close-up, typically on the right or left third of the frame. Within a relatively narrow range shot composition was adjusted slightly for each performer. Within each performer's single-line statements, the camera composition would be set to left, right, in or out to add some visual variety throughout the finished program. Realizing that the single-line statements would be cut together in a fast moving fashion, varying the composition of each line was important to avoid the inclusion of *jump cuts*. Small, subtle pans (left/right camera movements) were executed during longer monologues to mimic natural eye movement that might take place during an in-person interview. Finally, for extended monologues *cut-away* shots of each actor's hands and/or body were filmed. Typically the *hands-shots* as we called them, involved subtle sideways and up and down camera movements to mimic natural eye movements of the interviewer. These shots would be used to add visual variety to the longer segments and to contribute to the visual representation of each character. For example, some participants were very expressive with their hands while others' arms were paralyzed, negating any hand motion at all to offer a subtle honor of embodied difference without creating spectacle. The express goal of this technique was to cite the real-life interview setting, filming each actor at an interpersonal distance in a manner that provided visual cues about her or his disability, posture and mood.

Monologues were filmed between one and twelve times. Reasons for retakes generally were twofold: the correction of delivery errors or to motivate the most accurate and believable portrayal. Both Julie-Ann and Frank encouraged the students, striving to elicit the best performances possible, often seeing and suggesting potential character enhancing nuances such as delivery emphasis, meaningful pauses or subtle movements.

Frank: Offering a third set of expertise and hands to the Project

My contributions during recording sessions ranged from documenting information on a film clapboard to mentoring performers on request or at my discretion. Consistent with activities prior to recording, the filming environment re-

mained open, comfortable, and collaborative as we sought to co-create *Cripping*. Julie-Ann praised performance elements, offered constructive criticism, requested precise changes and consulted with me (as associate director), Bill (as filming director) and the actors to set goals for subsequent takes.

Julie-Ann, who ultimately functioned as the final decision maker for what went into the film, requested and considered input on all facets of a presentation including: performer physical/vocal depiction relative to subtext and rhetorical objectives shaped during rehearsals, general frame composition (medium shot, facial close-up, emphasis on hands, etc.) and frame adjustments per monologue section, background aesthetic (color and gobo light pattern). Once all production team members offered input, Julie-Ann reached a decision or, in some cases, asked someone else to "make the call" in light of inclination or expertise. This approach reinforced her collective approach to the project as co-constitutive ethnography, encouraging group decision-making as the shooting schedule allowed. This process mirrored the desires of Performance Ethnography that embraces "the muddiness of multiple perspectives, idiosyncrasy, and competing truths, and pushes everyone present into an immediate confrontation with our beliefs and behaviors" (Jones, 344). This process allowed all of us to struggle together and take responsibility for the final creation.

Julie-Ann: Reassessing Boundaries between Researcher and Performers

In many ways, collaborating with two very experienced directors and remaining in dialogue with the actors' feelings and perceptions calmed my own anxiety over the project. At times, I desperately wished to share the ethical responsibilities, and relinquishing a call to someone less attached to the project and participants allowed me to continue when in doubt. Part of me craved distance from the final project so I had no intention of performing the characters, reasoning that my 10+ age above the students would be distracting with such a homogenous cast—(my disability was concealed since all the characters were sedentary during filming)—but I ended up performing three of the characters and in the end appreciated the chance to identify with the students' struggles throughout the process as one of the actors in addition to their director.

One character I knew felt uncomfortable with younger women, often sensing competition and judgment. Through ongoing conversations with her over the years I knew she would rather not be portrayed by a college student. In turn, I decided to take on Patty's monologue about two weeks into rehearsal since I did not have a student actor that would meet Patty's approval. She was relieved to learn that I finally decided to portray her myself. In addition, when I had given Dierdre's monologue to a few different students to read, they tended to perform her angry and unapproachable, saying how they "didn't like her" or "She seems too mad." While understanding ability-based discrimination was a focus of the course, I was worried to assign her to anyone before knowing for

sure if she could achieve enough understanding for an ethical, empathetic portrayal. While I had one student I was confident could access her, I had already given her one very challenging character and had promised that her other characters would be less complex and "happier." So I decided to perform Dierdre. Ingrid, the final character I played was originally performed by a student but despite several rehearsals and takes the day of filming, the student continually portrayed her as angry rather than strong, and antagonistic rather than direct. No amount of direction seemed to alter this interpretation. Finally, after reviewing the lines over and over, I decided that the student did not give an empathetic performance. I could not say for sure whether it was lack of character range or misunderstanding. Frank and I had not succeeded in helping her access the character. After talking with Frank, I concluded that I would be uncomfortable with Ingrid (the actual participant) seeing an actor portray her in that manner. By this time the semester was nearly over, and the students had transitioned to writing final reflections about the project, so I decided to re-film the lines after the close of the semester as a third character in the final film. Upon making this decision, I memorized the monologues and lines, and set up a meeting with Frank for direction.

Frank: Directing the Director

Given that Julie-Ann conducted the interviews and is an accomplished performer, it was a special pleasure to assist with her preparation. Julie-Ann's interest in my reactions and recommendations to her depictions further revealed her collaborative approach to creating final versions of each video speaker. As with student-generated characters, to assist my work, as the script author/director she relayed her personae's back stories and key persuasive goals. Julie-Ann then solicited my reactions to her physical and vocal choices to convey character subtext and objectives. During these sessions, we also discussed frame composition for her presentations along with our general approach to stage and camera performance.

Julie-Ann: The Comfort of a Director's Opinion

Frank was a major comfort to me during these rushed rehearsals. A skilled director to offer insight into my performance gave me confidence in being able to portray the characters as I knew them and communicate their significance to an audience. Frank's direction and feedback allowed an opportunity to see how the characters would be perceived through my body by someone who had never met the participants to which I felt so close.

Despite a few monologues needing to be re-filmed after some students accidently taped over them with footage of a golf tournament, filming ended successfully, and we entered into the January semester with hours upon hours of

footage, a script filled with notes and adjustments, and pages logging the dates, takes, and decisions throughout the semester. In January, Jeff, our student editor, entered into the process. It was time to create a final product.

Editing: Where Fragments Became the Final Product

Bill: Editing Started From the Beginning, but Became the Focus in the Spring

The first steps of the digital editing process began while production was still underway. Immediately following each shoot, all of the footage was transferred onto a computer hard drive, organized into folders for each character, and reviewed and renamed accordingly. Bad takes were moved to a *bad take* folder just in case they might be needed during editing. Once filming was completed and the files were properly organized, the multi-step editing process began. Student editor Jeff who was enrolled in a directed individual study with me followed the original script to compile the program segments using Adobe Premiere digital editing software. The first step was to edit a short section including the opening text introduction, a collection of narrator comments and one monologue. Julie-Ann and I would review the editing and suggest adjustments going forward. After a few modest corrections to the trial edit of approximately four minutes, editing progressed quickly. Jeff built the program section by section following the script and adding titles where necessary.

The goal was to create a production not over 50 minutes and it was feared early in the editing process that the combined sequences may run over an hour. A 45-50 minute total runtime would perfectly suit classroom and academic conference screening windows. Draft edits were provided for review throughout the editing process, and the directors checked for continuity, flow and title accuracy.

Once the final sequence of titles, monologues, narration and statement compilations was in order, fine-tuning began. *Lower-third* titles of each interviewee's alias and disability were added. Ethereal instrumental music was added to the program to enhance the flow and mood. Audio levels were adjusted to insure that music was clearly discernable over text and during quiet sections, and lowered during monologues and statement compilations so that vocal delivery was clearly audible. A variety of fine technical and aesthetic corrections were implemented: testing of various fonts to identify an appropriate and stylistically pleasing font, shortening individual shots by fractions of seconds to enhance flow and pace, adjusting font size, and inserting a moving scroll for the introductory titles. The original opening title sequence was simplified to convert the complexities of the academic description of the project into a title more appropriate for the TV screen.

Julie-Ann: Returning to the Dilemma of How to Indicate Disability with Able-Bodied Actors

I met with Jeff early on in the editing to discuss potential ways to indicate the presence of assistive devices without literally assigning them to the able bodies on the screen. Jeff explained that open source images of accessibility devices without people in them could be spliced into the film to cue the audience of the ability of the participant from which the monologue emerged. We searched for images that were clearly not owned by individuals (either the device or the photo) but open source stock photos of devices that would potentially compliment the ability of the participant being performed. Unfortunately, most of these images were available via medical supply ordering websites which I worry re-emphasizes a medicalized, marginal view of the bodies but was the best we could find to cue the audience of a potential assistive device distanced from presence of the able-bodied actor portraying the character. With this decision, the film was edited and Bill and I took a look at the first cut and prepared the film for an audience.

Bill: The Fine-tuning Tough Calls

Final editing activities included two major elements. First, after viewing the program in its entirety it was decided that one of the monologues would be omitted in the final version. Julie-Ann and I realized that one actor who had portrayed two different characters did not sufficiently differentiate the two performances and leaving both performances in the finished program could be distracting.

Julie-Ann: Editing Illuminated Potential Errors in Casting

The first time I saw the whole film through I realized it was a bit long, and the most obvious monologue to cut was portrayed by a dedicated, very talented student who took several classes with me and performance ethnography extremely seriously. Knowing the student seemed most comfortable with understated characters I had made the mistake of giving him two monologues that had similar demeanors and speech patterns. The subtleties differentiating them simply were not enough to distinguish between them especially since the characters were placed in conversations with one another in addition to their monologues being close together in the script. In addition, the strongest takes had issues with volume (the actor was soft spoken and there was a buzzing noise in the background). After seeing that the majority of the monologue was also included in the conversations surrounding it, Bill and I collectively decided to remove it from the video.

Bill: The Technical Adjustments for Polish

A number of the performances included an unacceptable level of room noise or audible hiss generated in the recording process. Initial inspection of the video clips during filming did not reveal the degree of noise and its negative effect. Noise reduction techniques were applied to the offending clips to create as pristine an audio track as possible. We wanted this to be a strong final product for its national presentation and eventual publication. By the first week in June, the film needed to be ready for its first audience, communication studies scholars interested in Integrated Marketing Communication.

Final Thoughts: Responding Film's Trial Audiences

Julie-Ann & Bill: Comforted by Their Interpretations

We showed the first 20 minutes of the film to the scholars at the intimate conference sponsored and held at our campus, followed by the advertisement designed by our advanced marketing students to publicize the film. The focus of the presentation, given the audience, was the graphic and intended distribution of the film rather than the actual content. The audience present, for the most part, was unfamiliar with performance studies, giving us a glimpse into how someone who stumbled upon the video on the internet might respond. Overall people responded strongly to the film's content, and the conversation focused on the video itself rather than its marketing plan. The simplistic introduction (we decided the original was too long, so we left it more concise and in turn more ambiguous) compelled some to assume the actors were the actual interviewees until several minutes into the film. Realizing the actors were able-bodied startled some but also fostered a deeper connection with the monologues. One feminist and sexuality media studies colleague noted, and I paraphrase, that coming from *any* body, rather than *the* body that lived the story the performance re-cited, caused him to imagine himself giving that monologue from a different time, through a body that was not young, athletic, and able like it is now. At that moment I wondered if the actors' bodies, present and in conversation with each other and directed at the audience, allowed a sort of pedagogical "enfleshment" for the audience as described by John Warren, one that "not only imagines the body as a political and viscerally experienced source of cultural knowledge but also as a method to explore the possibility of social worlds that are imagined but not yet realized" (262). That like the students, the possibilities and even inevitabilities of changing embodiments was now more apparent. The idea that their bodies were vulnerable, that the story could be theirs, just like it could one day be the young actor's, became tangible to them. Rosemary Garland Thomson notes that the able-bodied gaze demands the story of the disabled (Extraordinary Bodies and Staring). Perhaps, in some ways,

moving the story from the body marked as Other, to those not only marked as "normal" but young and beautiful, evoked connection that may not have emerged otherwise. In this way, perhaps audience members were more willing to enter into the co-constitution of physically disabled identity, to be "body-to-body" with the stories when performed through bodies they identified with than if through bodies they could immediately dismiss as Other (Jones, 344).

The Second Showing: The Clash of Disability Arts and Performance Ethnography as Pedagogy: Julie-Ann, Bill, & Frank

We featured the film at the 2013 National Communication Association Convention (NCA) in Washington D.C. as a session in the Disability Issues Caucus. We were able to show the first 45 minutes before distinguished scholars in disability performance art and multimedia performance responded and opened the floor to discussion. From that conversation a tension developed between the importance of providing a space for disabled people to speak for themselves (rather than being embodied by another) and the value of students entering into the ethical and artistic communication process of performance ethnography. Some suggested that we should ask the original participants to tell their own stories and anything else would be silencing to them. This would have been impossible since the participants were open to having students hear their voices to inspire their monologues, but only agreed to participate in the study because the interviews were confidential. Plus, this film was part of a class focused on performance ethnography and disability social justice and therefore the struggles surrounding embodying another were central to the course. A documentary without students would not accomplish these goals. Another audience member suggested that we could have chosen age appropriate disabled actors to participate (even if their impairments were different, at least they were part of the community featured). This is a legitimate argument, as Alison Kafer asserts, while ill and disabled bodies have extremely varying visceral experiences there is a "connectedness from being labeled as disabled or sick and facing discrimination as a result" (ll). As mentioned before, we considered this, but decided that undergraduate pedagogy was a primary goal, and therefore casting students in the film was essential, and no students with visible impairments were interested in participating.[2] However, in future re-enactments of this course the idea of inviting local actors that identify as members of the community being

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[2] This course was promoted at open advising within the communication studies department for any student who had completed the general introductory course in performance or had any acting experience that would allow them to enroll in a 400-level applied learning course. While I (Julie-Ann) would have been enthusiastic to have a cast of diverse abilities, or just more diversity in general, none requested to join and collectively, we were not aware of any students to approach personally.

featured is appealing and we would welcome this addition if they were interested and available.

After the session ended different Performance Studies and Disability Studies colleagues approached us encouraging us that they were so impressed that undergraduate students were able to accomplish such performance work and that they would love to be able to show the video to their classes which ranged from undergraduate students, to medical interns in order to prompt discussion surrounding the ethics of embodying another in performance art. Some noted that the student actors would be easy for their classes to relate and respond to. Several suggested that we publish the video with an explanatory essay in *Liminalities* or a similar open access venue where scholars, artists, and disability practitioners could find it and use it for pedagogy purposes. One audience member told us, "What you did here is great. Performance research has different goals. Yours does not need to be a documentary." Another reiterated the sentiments of the first audience that he had never before realized the vulnerability of his own embodiment, and realized at that moment, "anyone could be disabled." We agree with their statement and embrace the value of this project even with the pedagogical, artistic, and social justice struggles that remain.

The response at NCA convinced us that some changes were necessary to guard against misinterpretation. We stand by our choices that were made with much reflection (though perhaps we will do things differently in the future) but do not want those choices to be misinterpreted by audiences. First, we added a second screen at the beginning that contrasted in color to the first to highlight that this project had pedagogical goals in addition to creating a performance piece and that it was not a documentary (all the actors were enrolled in a Performance Ethnography special topics course). Second, we decided to have the credits run at the beginning of the show rather than at the end so that audiences were again reminded that the film featured actors engaged in performance ethnography and was not a documentary. Deception and/or confusion are not goals of this project and we are comfortable with edits that emphasize the intent.

Our Last Words as a Collective Voice: So it's Finished but Not. We're Happy, Even Proud, but Questions Remain

So now it's done. Well, sort of. We're still open to edits, wondering about takes, and questioning choices. The one part that is complete is that involving the students in the class. Grades were distributed a long time ago, of the nine enrolled, six have graduated and moved on. During the project, we witnessed students' respect for the original participants, often appearing to achieve empathy with their struggles in rehearsals and filming, as well as in their final reflections for the class. Our undergraduate department and the institution as a whole places applied learning as a *core value,* believing that these life experiences beyond the

classroom prepare our students for engaged, active reflections and societal contributions beyond their degrees. We can say with confidence that this project shaped some of the students in a profound manner and allowed them to see, through our collaboration, what open team creation can look like in daily performance. In addition, Bill and Frank know more about the performance of disability and performance ethnography, Julie-Ann knows more about what goes into filmmaking, and we all learned something about directing students in the embodiment of Others. Overall, we are happy. It looks good and it seems like audiences like it, but we realize despite all of our reflexivity:

> We know this as much as we can know anything—we know that we are always behind, always unable to see our blind spots, even as we squint, strain, and stare. We are subjects constituted and, even in our attempt to reconstitute, are not capable of always seeing what has been so carefully obscured through time. We assume part of this blindness is our defensiveness, our own not wanting to see it (McRae and Warren 61).

As teachers, scholars, and artists we question our decisions. Bill wonders about the possibility of lighting and sound decisions and angles. Julie-Ann questions casting decisions, Frank initially suggested we take the script to the community in an effort to cast diverse bodies in the roles, and Julie-Ann questions if the pedagogical gains by casting it as an upper-level Communication Studies class were worth the homogeneity of the cast that ensued. Then again, perhaps these beautiful, young actors in some way allow us to see the narratives as a collective story, one we all know and perform through bodies mortal and inescapably vulnerable to change as some audience members suggested.

Julie-Ann acknowledges with Alison Kafer that, "even though I am a disabled person, I do not exist apart from ableist discourses circulating through U.S. society; to act as if my impairments render me immune to, or incapable of, ableist rhetoric and ideology would be to deny the insidiousness of compulsory able-bodiedness and able-mindedness" (19). The struggle to see disability as political is ongoing for all bodies, and having bodies unaware of this conceptualization grapple with it as part of their college education is productive. Throughout the semester students were introduced to compulsory able-bodiedenss and disability as an identity in pursuit of social justice, and each student by the end of the filming process could discuss their characters' experience in these terms. That said, was the project transformative? We don't know. Julie-Ann is a bit haunted by a student who after the class's end asked for a "blurb" to describe what the film was about to include in his/her senior portfolio. Shouldn't she/he know? Did it not change her/him in some way? Is the impact gone after just a semester? We don't know. We are also aware that like a respondent at NCA reminded us, "No one is going to read your 10,000 word essay and this could turn into a film that allows cultural members to distance themselves from the participants' stories rather than connect with the vulnera-

bility of all bodies." We hope that featuring the video with the accompanying essay in the pedagogical section of a Performance Studies journal will help minimize this response, but we cannot say for sure. What we can say is that the story of *Cripping* is digitally archived. A story from stories has been created that evoked its first audience to create more stories. In the words of Della Pollock:

> A story is not a story until it is heard; once it is heard, it changes – and becomes open to the beauties and frailties of *more* change; or *a story is not a story until it changes.* Indeed, until *it* changes *someone else,* until it becomes part of the vital histories of changes it recounts (93).

This film is part of the history of this project, of the directors, of the students, of the research participants, past and future audiences. Questions remain but performance has been created to initiate dialogue. Thanks for being part of it. We hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,
Julie-Ann, Bill, and Frank

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