Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada

Conference by Véro Leduc
October 3, 2019, in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal (Quebec, Canada)

This conference is part of *Interrogating Access*, a series of talks and workshops on accessibility in art and media production developed by OBORO and Spectrum Productions with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts. OBORO and Spectrum Productions acknowledge that their activities take place in Tiohtià:ke, an unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory.

(Beginning of transcription)

[Interpreter's voice] Good evening everyone. Thank you for taking the time to come. I'm honored to kick off the *Interrogating Access* series of lectures and events. Thank you Tamar and Dan, from Oboro and Spectrum, for the invitation. It's truly a lovely opportunity, a very good initiative. I was very impressed and it encouraged me to get involved.

If there are people here that need the audio description, would you please raise your hands? All right, that won't be necessary.

I am a deaf person. I can express myself in LSQ, Quebec Sign Language, but this evening I'll be giving the lecture in French. A video will be recorded and the closed captioning will include LSQ interpretation.

[Véro Leduc] Good evening. [Laughs]

As Tamar mentioned, I'll be talking about the research I did for Canada Council for the Arts.

This is the first time that I'm presenting this research publicly. These are still preliminary results. To me, it's a piece of artwork in progress, a sculpture that's still incomplete. Research projects can always be refined further, and our reflections can always go deeper. It's like wine: it takes time to mature. I'll share with you this evening what has emerged so far. However, layers still need to be chipped away to help further refine the sculpture, with a wonderful and very large team.

To begin with, I'd like to explain that today's presentation is based on data from a research project entitled *Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada*, sponsored by the Canada Council for the Arts.

However, all content presented tonight is from the perspective of the research team, and does not involve the responsibility of the Canada Council for the Arts in any way.

It's the same as when you watch a movie and the production company has a disclaimer at the beginning, saying that they don't hold themselves responsible for the opinions stated in the film. The same applies this evening for the Canada Council for the Arts: The content does not engage its responsibility in any way beyond its existing policy and commitments. I really like to start in an interactive way, to get a feel for the room. What do you know about Deaf or disabled artistic practices? Are there any Deaf or disabled artists that you already know? Yes?

[Person in the audience] He passed away, it's Denis Juneau, who was deaf.

[Véro Leduc] Thank you! Any others? Yes?

[Person in the audience] In dance, but I forget their name.

[Véro Leduc] France Geoffroy perhaps, who is a pioneer of inclusive dance in Quebec? That's right, France Geoffroy with Gang de Roue. Does anyone else comes to mind?

[Person in the audience] Les Muses, they work with artists who have disabilities.

[Véro Leduc] Yes, absolutely. So, Les Muses: Centre des arts de la scène. Do you have examples what caught your attention with these artists? In what way were you touched, either working with them or experiencing their artwork, or while commemorating them?

[Person in the audience] An exceptional form of art, but ... how can I say? Something to be discovered.

[Véro Leduc] All right, so a form of art to be discovered, perhaps because they aren't well-known yet, unfortunately. We're hoping that this lecture and other initiatives this year can increase awareness of the Deaf and disabled arts sector of practice.

We worked on this research project with an impressive team, with two co-researchers, Mouloud Boukala and Joëlle Rouleau, respectively from École des médias at UQAM and Film Studies at University of Montreal, and also: Aimee Louw, Ashley McAskill, Carolyne Grimard, Catherine Théroux, Cynthia Benoit, Daz Saunders, Élodie Marcelli, Laurence Parent, Line Grenier, Tamar Tembeck, Noah Eidelman. Olivier Angrignon-Girouard, and Sarah Heussaff.

As you can see, many people contributed to this research. I'll now briefly summarize the historical context of the project.

In Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts was created in the late '50s, but it took until the '70s before funding for Deaf and disabled arts became somewhat significant.

An Equity Office was put in place in 1991, and an Aboriginal Arts Office in 1993. It wasn't until the end of the '00s that disabled arts were recognized as an artistic practice, and Canada Council for the Arts created a Program Officer position.

Funding was put in place for artistic organizations, with a support and development program. In 2012, Canada Council introduced the "Expanding the Arts" policy, which is an access and equality strategy for the

advancement of disabled and Deaf artists' practices.

In 2017, these artistic practices were recognized as a separate and distinct field of practice.

In 2018, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec [Quebec Arts and Literature Council] created an advisory committee for its action plan to support disabled artists. This is now an action plan that organizations must follow. They were already doing it each year, but without necessarily consulting Deaf or disabled people.

Within this context, we can see that there has been a growing interest toward Deaf and disabled artistic practices these past years, as well as growing institutional interest in supporting artists, organizations, and the field.

The objectives of our research were to foster a better understanding of issues surrounding the artistic practices of Deaf or disabled artists, of collaborations that exist between the Deaf and disabled arts sector and those of the arts "in general" (meaning non-disabled and hearing), and of practices enabling the recognition, support and promotion of Deaf and disabled artistic practices.

We worked with a research strategy that was reflected in a collaborative approach.

Our team was a wonderful bunch of individuals: deaf people, people with disabilities, neuroatypical people, and allies.

We relied on participatory and inclusive methods for the collection of data, and took into account power dynamics which could exist.

What are participatory and inclusive methods? For example, it means offering to hold interviews in ASL or LSQ, and making participant recruitment accessible. We also gave participants opportunities to share their needs so that we could provide equity measures.

Our conceptual framework sourced a large part of its theoretical anchors from critical disability studies, which provide a view of disability that

distances itself from the way it's traditionally considered, that is, from a medical perspective. We also based our framework in Deaf studies and cultural studies.

Feminist, postcolonial, and intersectional approaches also enabled us to take into account a variety of power dynamics which intersect with the sector of Deaf and disabled arts.

We worked with various concepts such as self-determination, cultural accessibility, cultural citizenship, as well as ableism and audism, which are types of systemic oppression that mainly impact Deaf and disabled people. At the methodological level, we reviewed the literature to see what was already being done, but mainly what was being said, or not said, about Deaf and disabled arts, only to find that much is being done, but that there aren't many scientific publications about these practices.

We also looked at statistics: How many artists are there in Quebec, in Canada? What's the statistical portrait? What we saw is that there are still discrepancies, particularly in levels of income. For Deaf or disabled people in general, access to the labour market is more difficult as they encounter systemic barriers. It's the same thing for artists here.

All that is what is called secondary data. The bulk of our work was invested in the collection and study of primary data, where we collected information ourselves in the field through interviews and group discussions.

Our recruitment approach was fourfold, targeting French, English, LSQ and ASL communicators. 85 people participated, out of the 121 who were interested.

We held 34 individual interviews, and 8 group interviews with a total of 52 people.

We then ran a thematic analysis on the data, to see who were the artists, what their practices were, how the sectors were organized, what methods they used to work, what relationships existed between Deaf and disabled arts sectors and the arts in general and, finally, what the funding practices were like.

We visited eight cities across Canada last summer, literally almost coast to coast: Winnipeg, Vancouver, Quebec City, Toronto, Edmonton, Ottawa, Halifax and Montreal.

We had meetings in each city, and it was very interesting to meet people in so many different places. We found some things that were specific to each location, but also many things that were similar, especially in the ways that systemic ableism was experienced. As it turns out, it's pan-Canadian.

We met with disabled people and Deaf people, but also with non-disabled people. Individual interviews were for artists who identify as Deaf or disabled, and discussion groups included cultural workers who weren't necessarily disabled—people who work in the sector of Deaf or disabled arts, or in the arts sector in general—but who have an interest, for example in cultural accessibility.

We also met with "mad" people, who reclaim madness in a positive way. It's a bit like the word "queer", which was an insult, and has been reclaimed, or the insult "crip" which has also been reclaimed (I'll speak more about that later). It's the same thing for "madness", which has been reclaimed in a positive way. We also met with neuroatypical people, and people with cognitive disabilities.

The research involved many English-speaking participants obviously, since we were in several cities in Canada, but even so, there was a good balance with French-speaking and deaf people who communicate in ASL or LSQ. Many more women than men participated, and some non-binary people as well.

Most participants were white. However, 17 people of colour and 5 Indigenous people also participated in the research.

There was a diversity of artistic practices, with artists who were painters or videographers and so on, but also a diversity of organizations: museums, arts centers, and more.

There was also a diversity of status, with artists who define themselves as professional artists, and others who were on the way to become professionals; others were cultural workers. There was also age diversity,

and participants in discussion groups came from 40 or so organizations in Canada.

As I was saying earlier, this is very much like a sculpture, and it's the first time that I'm presenting these results. It's far from being complete. Considering the time allotted for this presentation, I've tried to pick out the highlights.

One of the things that stood out in the research was the level at which Deaf or disabled artists questioned and deconstructed the medical model of disability.

For those who are less familiar with this model of disability, it's a model that mainly focuses on pathology. It suggests that disability exists because a person has physical or cognitive limitations.

In opposition to this model, some Deaf or disabled people have said: "We don't experience disability as being inscribed in our bodies; we experience it through the barriers we encounter in society."

This is what is called the social model of disability, where disability is created by barriers that exist in society. For example, if a building has an access ramp, there's no disability: a person who rolls can access it just as much as someone who walks.

Pushing forward a little more, we have the affirmative model of disability (also called socio-subjective model of disability), where disability can also be considered as something creative and complex.

The socio-subjective model says that even if we deconstruct all the barriers that exist in society, we remain a diversity of people.

For example, as a Deaf person, I'll never hear pillow talk, the kind that happens in the dark. You could say: "Let's turn on the light, you can read my lips!" But it wouldn't really be pillow talk then, would it? This means we can deconstruct the barriers, but it doesn't change our unique lived experiences as Deaf or disabled people.

In the affirmative model, disability can also be used in a creative way. For

example, Deaf studies scholars talked about Deaf gain, by saying: "Stop calling it a hearing loss! We also see it as a gain." For example, if a person was in the other building, we could communicate through the windows, whereas hearing people have to be next to each other. It's similar when communicating across subway platforms or in a very noisy concert: Deaf people will be able to communicate, where hearing people won't. Even underwater, we can communicate in sign language.

The practices of Deaf and disabled artists bring together an impressive diversity of artistic practices, both at the level of the mediums—as I said earlier, this may be in photography, dance, etc.—but also in various stances and discourses.

Some people will say, for example: "I'm really uncomfortable with the expression 'Deaf Art'. I'm a deaf person, and I create art, but I don't consider my art as 'deaf'."

We've seen many different stances. I'm not an art historian, but in the field of cultural action, we're also interested in the diversity of mobilization practices. For example, in feminist art, some may say: "I'm a feminist, my practice is feminist, but is my art feminist? Not necessarily."

We can see this in different contexts of social groups, or minoritized people: sometimes, just by looking at a piece, we can clearly tell that the work is explicitly feminist or decolonial, and at other times, it's less obvious.

People also discussed and reflected on various forms of cultural representation. All in all, four distinct and complementary aspects emerged from the research regarding the practices of Deaf or disabled artists.

The first is the issue of visibility, or absence of visibility, of one's identity as a Deaf or disabled person. Sometimes, the practice reveals nothing about this identity.

For example, we won't necessarily be able to guess, by looking at a painting, that the person who created it is Deaf or disabled, or that another person is disabled by listening to them play piano, or that another artist is "mad" by looking at their photographs.

But there are other artistic practices where identity will be manifest when we experience the art. For example, the atypical body may be in the forefront, or the use of one or several sign languages will be featured.

We also noted that among topics covered in artistic practices, some will be intimately connected with lived realities as a Deaf or disabled person, and at the forefront, we find audism and ableism, and Deaf culture.

There was a participant who said in English: "My madness, or my mental health difficulties, they are kind of the impetus for doing some of what I do, and the content of what I do. But also, they help me stay well, because I think I'm proud of them."

Therefore: "I am proud of being a 'mad' person and of creating from this position."

Another painter centralizes disabled characters. And others, who also create, will not necessarily explicitly address their Deaf or disabled identity within their creations.

Others will also use their artistic practice to raise awareness. Jean-Audrey Chabot, for example, said: "As a musician, I make art, but I also do a little bit of educating." He said: "My work isn't being a lecturer, but I play on the street and I chat with people."

You may have noticed that sometimes I say people's names, other times I don't. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada encourages researchers to ask participants if they would like their names to be associated with their responses. It's a way to recognize their participation in building knowledge.

In universities and research, we also move forward thanks to the contribution of citizens. In this research project, the vast majority of people agreed to have their names associated with their responses.

The third approach involves active integration of the atypical body or sign language as a creative medium. In this instance, it's not simply wondering: "Is it visible or not?", but actively engaging it within artistic practice. It becomes a creative driver. For example, we spoke earlier about France

Geoffroy dancing in her wheelchair. Here, the chair becomes a creative vector.

As another example, the fact, for a nude model, of posing with an atypical body generates a relationship with the art, with creation, which makes it possible to centralize a relationship with the disabled body in a new way, perhaps, different from those we are accustomed to.

Some people also use their condition or sign language at the heart of their creation. Kathern Geldart said, "As a deaf person, I like to integrate signs from sign language into my paintings, and do it in a creative way." For example, she spoke of a butterfly, of playing with the creative potential that bodies and sign language can have.

Another position is that of cultural deconstruction. There's an expression in English, "cripping the arts." It comes from the word "crip", which was a slur against people with disabilities. This is along the same lines as the word "queer", which was a slur that people reclaimed. Disabled people reclaimed the insult "crip", saying: It's not shameful to be disabled, quite the opposite, we have pride in our identity, we're rebels, and we condemn your ableism, as we condemned heteronormativity and the patriarchy.

"Cripping the arts" involves artistic deconstruction from a disabled point of view. It opens the door to generating new ways to create art and to support artistic practices, to change the types of art that we encounter and to innovate by offering new ways to engage in it.

Catherine Frazee wrote, "Disabled people don't seek merely to participate in Canadian culture, we want to create it, shape, stretch it beyond its tidy edges." Therefore, we don't just want to be extras, we want to appropriate artistic practices.

In 2014, a forum was organized by SPiLL-PROpagation, a Deaf artists' center based in Gatineau. Twelve Deaf artists gathered for one short week for workshops in sign language about Derrida and the philosophy of Deconstruction. It was wonderful.

A manifesto was written, which reads: "A phonocentrism deconstructionist is a creative person who creates a work that questions, challenges, and

redefines phonocentric construction; to seek to recreate new formation through practice and process; and to induce social change."

We see here that art is not only a space reserved for art itself. Art also often provides a space to consider other possibilities, other ways of becoming. What is done in the arts influences and manifests what is being done in society.

Another example is a project that I'm working on with three Deaf artists, called *Our Vibrating Hands*. It's a creative research project in Deaf music. We live in a phonocentric context where often, music will be considered only from the point of view of sound, while in fact the term "muse" refers to inspiration, and "musica" refers to the rhythm, so rhythm can be visual, and isn't necessarily only sound.

I'll show you an excerpt. It's a piece of signed music that lasts two and a half minutes. It was created by Daz Saunders, who's a doctoral student in Linguistics here at UQAM. He created a song called *On the night*. There are no subtitles, it's in sign language. I'll give you the following, for those who don't know the language:

This is the sign for "night".
And this is the sign for "to sit".
When they're combined, we have "sitting on the night".
This is the sign for "stars", but in sign language, you can play with space.
So, normally, the stars would be up high.
But with him, since he's sitting on the night, the stars come from the bottom, like this.
You'll have these signs at least, so that you can appreciate it.

[Silence while the film plays on screen]

As you can see, deconstruction can sometimes make people uncomfortable [laughs]. People at first, will say: "Hey, the sound is off, there's no sound!" They'll have a lot of questions: Is it music, is it not music? Deconstruction practices invite new ways of interpreting the world and imagining artistic practices.

I did my thesis around a graphic novel in sign language, and in an

article that I published recently, I wrote about Deaf artists who reflect on ways to deconstruct the idea of speech bubbles. At the Phonocentrism Deconstruction of Art Practices Forum, a cartoonist, Jean-François Isabelle was saying: "Deaf cartoonists always draw comics with speech bubbles. How do I deconstruct this type of phonocentrism?"

Often, deconstruction also implies that it's not enough just to deconstruct systemic oppression. But we internalize a lot of things and the answers don't come to us immediately. This opens the door to creation. How can we create differently, as Deaf or disabled artists? This isn't obvious, and requires a research approach to creation.

In regards to Deaf arts, one of the things that we've noted in the past few years, is that the movement is migrating from a position that is more an affirmation of identity, to one that is more of a position of deconstruction.

Let me explain: In 1989, at Gallaudet, there was a gathering called *Deaf Way*, where artists created the *De'VIA* manifesto, where "De'VIA" means "Deaf Visual Image Art". In this work, they approached the question of what Deaf Art is.

When we look at these works that are part of the De'VIA artistic movement, we see that Deaf identity is at the heart of creation. For example, Nancy Rourke: All her works are very colorful. Deaf people often emphasize the visual dimension of their experience of the world, so there is a highly colorful aspect, and the hands which symbolize sign languages.

Chuck Baird: we see an image of a sky in which hands are making a sign. In these works, belonging to the Deaf community is often quite explicit. We can also see other works where, for example, hands are chained to illustrate the Milan Congress in 1880, where education in sign language was prohibited. People would beat children so they wouldn't sign. This history of oppression is also represented in visual art practices.

Within a perspective of deconstructing phonocentrism—I've shown you some examples—artists are really deconstructing normative practices, and it's not so much Deaf identity from an essentialist point of view which is in the forefront, but rather a questioning of audism and phonocentrism, and trying to consider different practices.

Katarina Ziervogel is a young Native Deaf artist in Winnipeg. We talked about how proud she is of her two identities, because for her, there were many similarities between First Nations and deaf people historically.

She draws a parallel between, for example, residential schools and the history of oralism, with deaf children who were forced to speak, instead of developing sign language, just as Indigenous children were forced to speak colonial languages and were forbidden to speak their native language.

There was the Indian Act, which had very negative and oppressive repercussions for Indigenous peoples, and also moments in Deaf history that we know less about.

Nor does she want to equate them. But in history, for example, we know Bell from the telephone company. Alexander Graham Bell was the husband of a deaf woman and the son of a deaf mother. He wrote a memoir entitled *Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*, in which he insisted on the importance of forbidding marriages between deaf people to avoid reproduction. It was really a eugenicist perspective, just like the Indian Act, that took away status from Indigenous women. This is set in a perspective of eugenics and assimilation.

In Deaf arts, sign languages are at the core of artistic practices. In Canada, we have five sign languages. Since last June, as part of Canada's first accessibility law, sign languages have finally been officially recognized as the first languages of Deaf people in Canada. We have Quebec Sign Language, American Sign Language, and also Indigenous sign languages, including Indian Plains Sign Language and Inuit Sign Language.

Disabled arts represent a part of this sculpture that is still a work in progress. There's an impressive diversity of artists working in the sector. One of the things that also came out of the research is the importance of having more disabled artistic representation on the screen, on stage, and the importance of being able to deconstruct these representations and break down stereotypes.

Often when we see disabled people on the screen, it'll be in roles where wretchedness is somewhat present: the person will be represented as living

in isolation or depression, or as being severely limited by their condition. These are representations that arise, ultimately, from the medical model we saw earlier, and participants mentioned hoping that we can come to represent disabled identities in a more affirmative, positive way. The idea isn't to negate disability, or to pretend that disability doesn't change anything. Of course we experience oppression, of course we experience sorrows and hardships. But there's so much more to it, and being able to show this is important.

Maxime D. Pomerleau, who appeared in the play *Guérilla de l'ordinaire*, a feminist play by Marie-Ève Milot and Marie-Claude Saint-Laurent at the Théâtre d'aujourd'hui recently, said: "With the media, it's difficult to talk about artistic practice, because they always focus on your personal history and your diagnosis. It's always 'your illness, your condition.' And they think that all of a sudden, you're going to forget your disability because you're creating. It's hard to just talk about what you're doing and to get people to recognize your work."

The media also have a role to play in the world of artistic practices. For example, when there's a new play or TV series coming out, the media will talk about it, and the way they talk about it will also influence the response to the work, and the way it's framed.

Even when a theatre play presents things a little differently, if the media still use a discourse that's limiting or based in pathology, or even sometimes "superhero-ish", that is to say, when they put a lot of emphasis on how extraordinary we are... It's often either we are subhuman, and pitied, or we're superheroes, but never just human beings, artists who have practices that we want to talk about, and share, without our identity as disabled artists necessarily being presented let's say, "ostentatiously".

Regarding mad arts and neuroatypical arts, perhaps something that's important to mention, is that the term "disabled" is not adopted by everyone. Also Deaf people, for example, will separate themselves from disability by saying: "We as a people have a language, a Deaf culture." This is, in fact, the only "disabled" community that has its own language. The approach is similar for mad or neurominority artists, who don't necessarily consider themselves as disabled. There are many different stances that co-exist.

The artist on this slide, Roselyne Chevrette, is a poet from Quebec City. She says: "Before anything else, with my art, I advocate for people who have an intellectual disability. I'm their spokesperson. At the moment, there's a project, a great life project." She becomes emotional when talking about this. She adds, "I'm not just doing it for myself, but also for others who have an intellectual disability."

There's a video circulating on the Internet right now. Maybe you've seen it, it's called: *Your limitations, not mine*. In this video, a doctor announces a diagnosis of Down syndrome and lists all the commonly held ideas. This alternates with images of people with Down syndrome who are graduating, who are business owners, who sing. It makes for a nice contrast to deconstruct prejudice.

Beyond artistic and creative practices, among others, there are practices in terms of dissemination which invite other ways of developing relationships with art. In particular, there's the concept of relaxed performances, which facilitate access for people who traditionally wouldn't always feel comfortable or literally wouldn't have access to regular performances. The theatre company Joe Jack et John used this approach for their play *Dis merci* ("Say thank you") at Espace Libre.

In a relaxed performance, some lighting will be left on. Often there will be an announcement at the start of the show about strong emotional content, or jarring light effects. People will be able to leave the room and return. What's interesting is that it's beneficial not only for disabled people or neurominorities, but also for other people, for example families with young children. It's a style of representation that's more and more common. Several cultural institutions and artists' centers, like MAI or Tangente, try to integrate these practices with an aim on accessibility.

We also see in the field some contexts where cultural offerings are a little more equitable. For example, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights comes to mind. It's a pretty impressive experience. When you walk in, there are videos in LSQ and in ASL. The content is offered in Braille. All the videos are captioned in sign language. The way in which interpreters are integrated into the works is very ergonomic. You see this person here, for example, who is there as an interpreter. It's very well designed. Sometimes, the ways in which accessibility technologies are used can be a bit

disconcerting, when it's big subtitles or it's not necessarily well done, simply applied in a technical way. But here, there's an obvious aesthetic concern to align both the accessibility and the aesthetics of the works.

The artists expressed themselves on different themes. One of the concepts that we found interesting to explore was the whole question of self-determination, and how artistic practices contribute to the self-determination of Deaf and disabled individuals, especially when they're closely and actively involved in these practices. Being fully involved in decision-making, whether in artistic decisions or executive decisions, contributes to their self-determination as members of society.

In parallel, there are also stances of wanting to support the emancipation of Deaf and disabled people. For example, the term "empowerment" is often used as the idea to restore power to those who don't have it. It was interesting to see how some artists were very critical of this notion, saying, for example: "To me, empowerment is a false declaration by organizations that aren't led by us."

This refers to non-disabled people and organizations that express wanting to work for our benefit, but where in the end, we still experience barriers or oppression through these practices.

Also, there is the whole question of intersectionality. Some artists noted that when we talk about Deaf or disabled artistic practices, people who are placed in a position of visibility will more often be white people, rather than culturally diverse people. In parallel, when we have events or initiatives in the field of cultural diversity, it'll be all hearing and non-disabled people. They said that it would be interesting to mix up the cards a little, that when we represent Deaf or disabled people, we could pay more attention to cultural diversity and, similarly, when we talk about cultural diversity, we could also include Deaf or disabled people in these representations.

Here on the screen is a quote from Audre Lorde, which says: "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." We're all complex human beings. It's a great way to reflect on intersectionality.

We've collected many reflections on what it means to be in a society where

we put forward inclusive cultural practices, the idea not only being to have a dominant culture that includes people by supporting them through empowerment practices, but real inclusion in the sense of breaking down barriers so that people can emancipate themselves, have self-determined practices.

Many reflections on the question of cultural representation took place in the context of this research. Stuart Hall, who is a great figure in cultural studies, wrote: "The cultural industries do have the power constantly to rework and reshape what they represent; and, by repetition and selection, to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more easily the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture."

Therefore, cultural representations of disabled people are constitutive of what can be imagined as being possible and intelligible.

Representations of wretchedness forged in the medical model shape the way in which, socially, we'll consider the people represented. Conversely, when representations are more subjective and support more affirmative or self-determined practices, we're in a position where Deaf and disabled artists have more recognition, as "full and equal members of society." I'm using large quotation marks here, because there's an artist who said: "I really hate being spoken of as a 'full and equal member of society'. Are we saying that disabled people used to be just a portion of an unequal person, and now suddenly, the world wakes up and I'm a 'full' person?"

There is also the issue of tension between wanting to be present in the media, on stage, on the screen, and at the same time, not wanting to be reduced to a single stereotypical representation. Maxime D. Pomerleau says: "In the media, I do feel truly recognized when writers don't find it absolutely necessary to put 'disabled' next to my name or the term 'dancer'."

This is saying: "We want to be more present, but try to avoid always reducing us only to this identity."

Alexandre Vallerand, who is an actor, said: "It would be fun to see new faces, and not always the same people, but also to see the idea that disabled people can be part of the family, too."

DAM (Diversité artistique Montréal) recently held a consultation on systemic racism in the arts and culture, where they discussed "color-blind casting". This means that when there's a role available, for example the role of a school principal, it can be played by a disabled person or by a person of colour. Disabled actors shouldn't be hired only to portray quadriplegics.

There's also the question of cultural identity usurpation—this is a new term that I'm trying to work with, and which may change by the end of the research project. For the moment, I find that it helps to differentiate between cultural appropriation, which is linked to issues of racialization, versus situations where Deaf or disabled people criticize the fact that hearing and non-disabled actors are playing the roles of Deaf or disabled characters.

Hodan Youssouf, for example, signs in LSQ: "Celebrities are stealing my language, my culture [...] There's a basic respect that should be maintained for our culture and our language." ... in particular, by hiring deaf people to play these roles. But unfortunately, with the UDA [Quebec Artists' Union], for example, it isn't possible for the moment to search the database for artists who are disabled or Deaf, whereas it's possible with any other criteria.

Artists identified a large number barriers. It's still difficult to try to classify them all, but one of the barriers I've already talked about is with intersectionality. This limitation speaks of cultural diversity, on the one hand, and accessibility on the other.

They also spoke of access to culture. Often we will think of cultural accessibility—it's happening more and more, even if there is still a long way to go—but it's usually for the audience. For example, we want relaxed performances, which exist for access by the audience. But what happens if the stage itself isn't accessible for people in wheelchairs? What if a gallery isn't accessible? We might very well say to a visual artist: "Hey, we're going to exhibit your paintings," but wouldn't it be odd not being able to go to your own opening because the gallery isn't accessible?

Access to training was also mentioned. There are many training programs offered in the arts, but due to a lack of architectural accessibility or interpreters, this training isn't accessible. This is a clear barrier for artists on the path to becoming professionals.

A lack of access to information is an issue also, with a lack of means to relay the information. Sometimes, institutions will have developed good practices, and will say: "But we had an interpreter, we had everything, how is it that nobody came?"

Well... Since the dawn of the world, the world hasn't been accessible for Deaf people. Just because you realized this, doesn't mean that there'll a crowd at the door all of a sudden, it's not as easy as snapping your fingers! Communication strategies need to be created to relay information to artists and communities, and also to demonstrate that it's a sustainable practice. This means avoiding things like: "We just had a subsidy, and we want to be cool, so we'll make our event accessible just this once during the year, even though all our other events aren't accessible."

Organizations have to find ways of developing trust, of communicating that they really do want to be accessible, and not just look cool during the one event.

There's also a lack of diversified communication strategies, for example with plain language or in sign language.

As well, there are many obstacles in accessing funding. Historically, one of the main obstacles was that artists whether disabled or non-disabled, received the same funding. But Deaf or disabled artists had to use a large part of these funds to pay for an interpreter or an attendant, for example. The Canada Council for the Arts has truly been at the forefront in this regard, by separating access support funding and creation funding. This means that two artists, disabled or not, will receive the same funding for creation, but Deaf or disabled people can ask for additional money for interpreters or attendants.

Still, there are obstacles that persist, for example in terms of rehearsal time. When working with neuroatypical artists, for example, a show that would usually take 50 hours of rehearsal might require more time, but that's not always taken into account.

So there remains, especially at the provincial level, a lack of funding for equity measures on a smaller scale. The Canada Council for the Arts

has made progress, but much remains to be done at the provincial and municipal levels.

In general, the biggest obstacle was the whole issue of systemic ableism and audism, which manifest through prejudice and ignorance. This is also something that exists in other systems of oppression, like homophobia, for example.

So even if there are laws, and rights that exist, the situation doesn't truly change until people develop attitudes that are respectful, inclusive, and ethical.

It's not always easy, because these prejudices come from ignorance, and people aren't necessarily acting in bad faith. There is a philosopher I like, Iris Marion Young, who wrote that "oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society."

People don't have ill will when they say, "Huh? Is there more than one sign language? Why don't you just pick one? It would be easier, you'd understand each other much better." Well, why isn't there just one single spoken language? Shouldn't we all speak English? Why should there be French?

So people aren't acting in bad faith. It's ignorance. But because there aren't necessarily any awareness campaigns, and because it isn't discussed in the education system, the responsibility falls on the shoulders of individuals even today.

Throughout all of this data collection, people have talked about possible solutions. At least 52 courses of action to date have been suggested. This was also in terms of funding, for example to prioritize strategically, and target Deaf or disabled artists as a priority group in the strategic planning of cultural institutions, and planning for separate funding for creation and access costs.

There have also been many suggestions for funding cultural accessibility in general, not just to support Deaf and disabled artists. Many artists spoke

up, saying: "I'd love my film to be subtitled for the festival"; or "I'd like my play to have interpreters"; or "I'd like my gallery exhibition to have audio descriptions." But there isn't necessarily funding for that, so accessibility should get funding in a more general way.

There were also the issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in cultural circles, so: hiring Deaf or disabled people, in particular as program officers in cultural institutions; recruiting Deaf or disabled people to serve on the boards of artistic organizations and work teams; consulting people about policy development, as CALQ did last year. It's encouraging for artists when they can see that an organization is interested in what they want, what they need, and not just in fulfilling its duties as an institution.

The whole question of cultural accessibility was an issue, meaning improving accessibility of training, creation, and production spaces. Artist residencies, for example, are not accessible in Quebec, so making residency spaces and training spaces more accessible.

Cultural offerings for the general public also nourish the creativity of artists. For example, if I can never go to the theatre, I'm not nourished in my practice. As artists, we need to be inspired. Cultural offerings have to be accessible, and we need to make people take responsibility for this. Often organizations don't take responsibility, and for the sake of equity, it shouldn't be Deaf or disabled people who have to do the work of inquiring whether an event is accessible, and then requiring accommodations. Rather, from a social justice perspective, the organizers should take this responsibility.

About training: Training or monitoring conducted by Deaf artists, for example, in ASL, LSQ, or native or international sign languages; accessible training should be available; mentoring practices can be developed. This was identified as a really interesting practice, where Deaf, disabled or neurominority artists have the opportunity to be mentored by a professional artist who has already developed their practice. It's also transmission of knowledge, for example how to navigate the funding system.

Flexibility was mentioned as well: Paratransit is really something, as scheduling is very problematic. Obviously, all the variations of systemic ableism have repercussions in the fields of the arts and culture.

Dissemination was also mentioned for artistic practices, not only through exhibitions focusing on disabled artists, but in the arts in general, by soliciting contributions from Deaf or disabled artists for any exhibition; avoid stigmatizing or stereotyping these artistic practices, since some artists don't necessarily express their identity in an explicit way. It can be a bit of a drag to feel that we have to meet the "quota," meaning that sometimes, we could perhaps meet the quota on paper, but if in addition, it's absolutely necessary that our art be explicitly Deaf, with hands, or explicitly disabled, it becomes limiting for artistic creation. So, as we said earlier, we want more representation and fewer stereotypes, to really dismantle categories.

Having more ethical cultural representation was another topic, meaning including Deaf or disabled people—in script-writing, for example—so that representation can reflect the diversity of lived experience; diversifying representation with the inclusion of people of colour or Indigenous people, in particular; creating search engine categories with the UDA, so that Deaf or disabled artists can be found more easily; and, finally, countering cultural appropriation by avoiding this type of practice, and also cultural identity usurpation.

In communication: developing strategies for inclusive communication; creating call for contribution forms in accessible language or plain language; meeting accessibility standards; developing a network to relay information; communicating detailed accessibility information. If your event isn't accessible, the first step is always to simply say so. Just tell us! "Sorry, the event is not accessible." For us, it means one less thing to do, as the information is already there.

Note that I mentioned only a few items for each of these themes. But in addition, in terms of communication and access to information, funding requests can be extremely dense and complicated. So it's important to prioritize a simplification of the language used in grant applications so that they become more accessible for everyone. When we began our research project, we had a general consent form, and another for people with cognitive disabilities. In the end, we decided to make just one, single form. Basically, no one likes reading endless definitions anyway, and if people want more information, we can give them access to it, but the form itself is the same for all. We realized that ultimately, it's possible to give the same information in an easier, simplified way, and that this also benefits other

people.

To conclude on the courses of action, there's the whole question of networking. Many people feel isolated as Deaf or disabled artists. There's a desire to create one or many pan-Canadian communication networks, and it's hoped that these sharing and collaboration spaces can be supported financially or technically.

I'll conclude with a reflection on a concept that I find interesting, that of cultural citizenship. When we talk about inclusion in the arts and culture, we often think a lot about the democratization of culture. Historically, culture at times has been elitist. The democratization of culture is the desire to give access to culture to people who have been historically minoritized or marginalized.

But over time, people have said they didn't just want access to a dominant culture. They wanted to participate in a meaningful way—as we saw earlier with the practice of "cripping the arts". For example, as a woman, if I go to the museum and only men are represented, that won't interest me anymore. If I go to see an exhibition for the fourth time and it's still the same... I want to see myself, I want to feel that I belong, and I want to contribute.

Cultural citizenship is a set of practices that allows for social participation, especially by minoritized people, through support for cultural and artistic production practices. This is what creates, among other things, a feeling of belonging to society. For example, as Deaf people, if we live in a society where there isn't any information available in sign language...

Often, I draw the parallel with French: "Imagine for a minute, as French-speaking people, that all the news bulletins are in English. All the plays are in English. All the books are in English, all the poetry, all the conversations, emails, everything, absolutely everything is in English. How would you feel? Where would you exist, where would you feel you belong, as a French speaker?" And I could make the example with any cultural background. Cultural citizenship helps support this feeling of belonging to society, in particular by promoting the visibility or presence of the various people involved.

So the democratization of culture means providing access to culture,

especially among communities that have been historically excluded. On the other hand, cultural democracy aims to truly support the diversity of cultural expressions and cultural representations.

Cultural citizenship can be defined as a combination of these two approaches of cultural democracy and cultural democratization, to which we could even add the question of cultural deconstruction. By this, I mean that people don't only want to express themselves through cultural and artistic expressions as minoritized individuals, but also to question and deconstruct the dominant system.

There are several examples of the democratization of culture: Deaf guides, for example, in museums; there are also exhibitions that are accessible to blind people through touchable works—this is one way of making them accessible. There was a music concert by the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec that invited Deaf women to attend the concert with balloons, to feel the vibrations.

Right here at UQAM, for Georges Didi-Huberman's *Soulèvement* exhibition, Louise Déry told me she wanted to make the exhibition accessible. My first response was to say, "It's nice that it's accessible, but why would Deaf people come to see your exhibit if it's only about the history of hearing people?" So she made the extra effort, and asked Georges Didi-Huberman to include a work about Deaf history. He made and integrated a piece in American Sign Language, and all the vignettes of the works were translated into LSQ. At the entrance, an iPad was given to visitors who wanted to access the descriptions of works in LSQ.

Another example of cultural democratization was an exhibition called *People of the Eye* at the Écomusée du Fier Monde. It was the first exhibition in Quebec where all the descriptions of the works were in LSQ or ASL. This created an upheaval of the norm—deconstruction is about overturning power relations. If you didn't know sign language, it was up to you to get your accommodation at the front desk, with a printed guide in French or English, as the works themselves were described in LSQ and ASL. The exhibition was about 160 years of history of the Deaf community, with several archival documents and artistic works.

Another example is *Cripping the Arts*, which was a symposium organized

several times in Toronto, with a desire to change—you can see it here— how we create and experience arts and culture. Here for example, we see a work by Carmen Papalia. There is a blind person at the front walking with their cane, and other people, sighted and blind, who are following, which generates a different relationship with the physical space.

I have many other examples. In fact, I could go on speaking for at least two more hours! However, this wraps up the little tour of our research on artistic practices, this sculpture in the making. I want to thank all 85 people who participated in the research for their contributions: the many reflections they brought forward were incredibly rich. I want to thank the research team as well—they're a really wonderful team.

The research project report will be available in 2020, and the sculpture will end up being completed at some point! Thank you very much.

(End of transcription)

Transcription and translation: Marie Lauzon, C. Tran. (Canada) & Nicole Champagne

OBORO

www.oboro.net

SPECTRUM PRODUCTIONS

www.productionsspectrum.com

Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts

(End of document)