

ACTS OF CARE

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This issue is an act of care. This issue asks you to read it, or listen to it, at your own pace. To take it outside to a quiet bench or tree and soak its words in, or take it into bed and read it under the blankets. This issue requests that you remember to stretch while reading it. To take deep breaths and remember to drink water and have a snack. This issue asks you to read it in pieces or all at once, in order or out of it, but to make sure you take moments to think and process what the artists and thinkers inside its pages want you to understand.

This issue is an act of care because this issue takes care. The writers in these pages consider you, the reader, as they write. Some ask you to participate in their experiments, to join in their acts of creation. Others call for you to explore ways to prioritize care in your own life and practice—giving the artists you work with, and yourself, the time and conditions you need to create, generate, and be. This issue is an act of care because it imagines a new kind of future—a new kind of theater—in which care is centralized and where disabled bodyminds find the conditions they need to flourish, create, and innovate.

Within this issue you will encounter artists whose work troubles the traditional definition of theater. Disabled artists have always pushed against those narrow divides: artists have created choreography from their beds and operatic compositions from assistive communication devices. That has never been more the case than during these past two years, when those of us who are immunocompromised or classified as “vulnerable” have been and are still confined at home. But the pandemic constraints have not stopped creation. Artists have continued to find a way, performing on Zoom screens and livestreams. Over the course of the pandemic, I have watched with admiration and hope the way theater collectives like Sins Invalid have created expansive livestreamed work, the way performance makers and activist scholars like Petra Kuppers have continued to cultivate spaces of communal curation, and the way performance artists like Indira Allegra have crafted moving meditations for us to perform together from afar. In the pages of this issue you will find their voices reflected, along with others who similarly have spent the past two years working toward creating a movement of work that meets all of our bodyminds where we are, as opposed to expecting us to conform to a set convention of what theater is supposed to be. There might have been a time when filmmakers like Allison Leigh Holt or curators like Ann Fox and Jessica Cooley would not have found a place in a theater journal. But these works represent new forms that theater can learn from, as theater makers find ways to evolve from this moment and learn from practices of care, flexibility, and interdependence that have always been a part of disability dramaturgy.

This issue is crafted in response to this particular moment in our North American cultural understanding of disability. We are bounded by this moment but also hope to be liberated by it. As several of the authors in this issue note, we are in the midst of a mass disabling event that has afforded disabled theater artists and theatergoers an unprecedented ability to see and participate in performance as our physical boundaries were broken down by mass necessity. As theater buildings open back up in 2022 and the industry reckons with what comes next, I hope this issue can provide provocation, guidance, and a space for reflection for you, our readers, to consider the ways in which theater and performance are—and have always been—spaces for disability.

Theater 52:2 DOI 10.1215/01610775-9662165

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