

BARNARD CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN

THE SCHOLAR AND FEMINIST CONFERENCE XXXVI

MOVEMENTS: POLITICS, PERFORMANCE AND DISABILITY

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2011

Janet Jakobsen: Good afternoon. Thank you. I'm Janet Jakobsen and I'm the Director of the Barnard Center for Research on Women and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the second half of what has already been a very rich and full day of our 36th Annual Scholar and Feminist Conference -- Movements: Performance, Politics and Disability.

And especially to welcome you to this special dance performance of GIMP by the Heidi Latsky Dance Company. You'll get a chance to clap.

(applause)

One announcement which is, we are -- in addition to sign language interpretation and CART interpretation -- we are also offering audio description of this event. So if anyone does not have an audio description device yet, and would like one, please raise your hand at this time and someone will bring the device to you. Do we have anyone who would like such a device?

Okay, good. I also have some particular thank yous for the people who have been providing communication assistance and interpretation this afternoon -- Lynette Taylor, Tavoria Kellam, Bill Moody, Jana Owen, Lusane Missaro[?], Lauren Schechter and Andrea Day. They've been doing a great interpretive job and I want to thank them very much.

(applause)

Finally, it's my very distinct pleasure to introduce Simi Linton who will then provide opening remarks for this dance performance. Some of you met her virtually this morning and now you'll get to meet her in person. And I want to thank her particularly because, as you can imagine, for those of you who know Simi's work and her dedication to the dance which you heard about this morning, she was a great deal of the inspiration for the entire flow of this particular version of our conference.

And so, I want to say thank you to Simi and also just give you a brief moment of her bio, which is very extensive because she's just done an incredible amount of work on this topic. As a writer, consultant and public speaker, Simi Linton is one of America's foremost experts on disability and the arts.

She works with a diverse range of cultural organizations, theater companies, film and television producers, museums, non-profit arts organizations, universities and other groups across

the country -- to improve and to increase the way disability is represented and depicted in all art forms.

Simi is co-director and producer of the forthcoming documentary, *Invitation to Dance*, which is based on her memoir, *My Body Politic*. She is the author of *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, which was also mentioned in the panel this morning; and numerous articles on disability.

Simi was on the faculty at CUNY for 14 years, leaving in 1998 to develop her consultancy to film makers artists and cultural institutions . . . including us; we are grateful for her help. Working to shape the presentation of disability in the arts and to increase the representation of works by disabled artists. And so, I'm very glad to be able to introduce to you -  
- Simi Linton.

(applause)

Simi Linton: Thank you so much, Janet. And as I've said to Janet , Catherine and several people -- thank you so much for bringing all my best friends to New York. I really appreciate it. I'm having a wonderful time. Oh, let me raise up here. This increases my cultural authority, I think.

(laughter)

Doesn't it? Life above, among the able-bodied has its . . . well, never mind. We have before us today, as the culminating event in a robust day of disability inquiry, the GIMP Project.

It is indeed a project about GIMPs and about gimpdom. But make no mistake, it is first and foremost a dance performance.

The GIMP Project serves the art of dance. It is a creative endeavor. It stretches the boundaries of art, and it yields the kinds of pleasures that only the arts afford. The GIMP Project breaks with tradition; but it comes to us, it emerges from the avant garde in modern dance. It is the brainchild of Heidi Latsky, who imagined it, shaped it and realized it. And whose experience in boundary-crossing, genre-defined dance led her to this point.

So that is what brings the GIMP Project to us. What brings us to the GIMP Project? What prepares us, the people in this room, to witness it? Find meaning in it? Enjoy it? Let's start by thinking about the history of dance, long before performance.

As Barbara Ehrenreich described in her wonderful book, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, dance is a universal phenomenon. It has existed since, you guessed it, the Stone Age. Ehrenreich even contends that humans, who have engaged in collective bonding rituals through dance, have had an evolutionary advantage.

The bonding advantage is rarely seen in modern society, with the notable exceptions of the Woodstock Festival and the dance at the Society for Disability Studies. Now, how many of

you have been to the dance at SDS? Oh, my God! I can barely stand to be in the room with you folks. I feel this sadness coming over me. Oh, gosh.

You're going to remedy this situation. It will transform your life; I promise. Okay.

Over the millennia, dance was transformed from what Ehrenreich describes as conga lines seen in cave paintings -- to more mannered, contained, scripted practices. Social dance and then eventually, in performance. What is not described in that history, or at least as far as I have gone in my research, is what types of bodies were included in dance across this enormous time span.

Whether people, who we would in modern times describe as disabled, were included both in community social dance; and then eventually in performance. What I do know is that when I entered disability, there were injunctions against dancing. How did I know with such certainty, not only that I couldn't dance, but that I mustn't dance?

That I shouldn't dance. How did I, as a young woman in my 20s know that I shouldn't flaunt my body in any way that brings attention to it? So there were the couldn'ts -- the sense that I had, that because I couldn't dance the way I did in my non-disabled state, that I wasn't able to dance.

And there were also, the injunctions, the social constraints that I felt that I understood -- that told me I mustn't dance. There were no signs on the walls at Studio 54 that told me that. I just knew it. I certainly didn't imagine disabled people performing on stage back then.

There were no physically-integrated dance companies in the 1970s, at least that I knew of. GIMP is a physically-integrated dance work, meaning that there are both disabled, and non-disabled dancers in the company. I have been astounded by the growth in recent years, of physically-integrated dance companies.

Some estimate that there are about 100 such companies in the United States, and many more around the globe. There is of course, the GIMP Project, AXIS Dance, Full Radius, Dancing Wheels, Danceability, Candoco in the U.K. Touch Compass in New Zealand, and of course many more.

The companies struggle to be understood as dance companies, solely because the presence of disabled dancers seems to signal to some people that this is an endeavor of a totally different sort. And some of these people are dance critics.

Other trends and developments have led us to this point, this presentation of the GIMP Project. Consider the disability rights movement. It seems to me, that the natural outgrowth of the struggle for rights and justice, the push for integration,

the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- is dance.

Dance is our Declaration of Independence. The dance floor is the ultimate site to stake our claim to public space; the place to enact coming-out rituals, coming-out narratives.

Then, consider disability studies. Just looking around the room, we can trace the genesis of the GIMP Project. In Sue Schweik's work, *Denuding: The Virulent Impulses Behind the Ugly Laws* -- that scholarship finds it apotheosis on the dance floor at SDS. And reconsider today, after you watch the GIMP Project, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's examination of the human act of staring.

In my own work, I have come to focus on dance. Both social dance and performance. In fact, it interests me so much, that it is a theme in the documentary film I am making with Christian Von Tippelskirch -- the man over there with the camera. I think dance is the ultimate frontier in disabled people's claim to full citizenship.

From the time I first dipped my little wheel onto the dance floor at a friend's party, a few years into the disability game, I became convinced that dance is our most useful weapon to fight against the imposed shame and alienation. Dance is the place where disability rights, disability culture and disability studies come together.

My absolute favorite place to dance is at SDS. And it is an astoundingly-integrated environment. Disabled and non-disabled people engaging in a collective free-for-all; a magnificently unruly, chaotic example of the collective joy that Ehrenreich describes.

Now, Heidi Latsky has never seen the dance at SDS when she conceived the GIMP Project; nor do I think she conceptualized GIMP as the outgrowth of the disability rights movement, or of disability studies. Heidi is an extraordinary dancer, and she knows dance. She danced with the Bill T. Jones Company for many years, before leaving to form her own company.

She imagined the GIMP Project because she is bold, curious and creative. This choreographer, who thought about the ways that bodies move, and then began to think about the ways that bodies -- not typically seen on stage -- move. And then began to think about the ways that bodies typically seen on stage -- and here today you'll see wonderful exemplars of that type -- might dance together with disabled people, to weave a whole much bigger than the sum of its parts.

So, ladies and gents, the GIMP Project.

[DANCE PERFORMANCE]

(applause)



Heidi Latsky: Can you hear me? Good, okay. The dancers are changing now, and I just wondered if anybody had any questions for me. Questions, comments. Yes?

Audience Member: Why was your decision to have \_\_\_\_\_ serious face?

Heidi Latsky: Throughout it? Throughout the show, you mean? Hmm . . . I don't think I encouraged that, the serious -- for the entire piece. But there is an intensity and a very strong internal life that I encourage the dancers, a space that they inhabit. I think every show shifts a little bit.

I think it depends on the environment. You know, this is a really strange configuration for us because there are no lights. You are very close. The space is not as big as we're used to. I think the intimacy -- I mean, they can speak to that themselves, like how it was to perform.

But I think that each situation that we perform in, there is a different relationship with the audience. So that may be one of the things you were getting.

Male Speaker: Hi. I think that one of the things was, because we had no backstage. So you had to see us on the side, and she wanted us to be focused. So we were like, just very serious. Yes, you saw a lot more of our faces.

Heidi Latsky: Usually we have wings. Usually the dancers are not on stage all the time, sitting in those chairs. We just

made a choice, and I kind of thought it was an interesting choice, considering the space that we were in.

Audience Member: I've been fortunate enough to see this piece a number of times, and it's got a rotating cast. And a lot of those cast members have similar, or maybe varying disabilities. And I was just wondering, can you talk a little bit about your process; about how you might approach the dance, or choreographing the dance as new people come in and out.

Heidi Latsky: That's a good, the summer we decided that we needed to grow the roster, just because of the amount of work that we were getting. It's a difficult piece to perform, as well. So as I was bringing new people into the process, it was very clear that I had to work with everybody individually.

And then, re-choreograph, like take the essence of what the solos were, and then make them a similar essence, but obviously a very different process, for each person that came in, if they had a really different body type. Do you want to talk about it, Toby?

Toby: My name is Toby and I met Heidi just over a year ago, when the show came to Burlington, Vermont, where I live. I already knew Lawrence and I knew some other cast members from Crip Spaces. And I ended up coming down to New York; Heidi thought I was interesting and I loved the piece.

And so, suddenly I was in New York for a week, having intense one-on-one rehearsal time with Heidi, trying to do this totally new thing with my body. And the person who was in my role before I was -- I sometimes say we occupied the same musical space because we don't do the same thing.

Her body is very different from mine. Heidi hadn't worked with someone on crutches before. So it's a lot of expiration . . . or Heidi would see me when we were working on something, and then we'd take a break and I'd be sitting somehow or moving or walking somewhere.

And she'd be like -- that, you need to do that, more of that! It's an intense and sort of interactive personal process, of figuring out how to fit a new body into an existing place. How to make new things for new bodies; old things with a different body.

And I've learned so much. It's been really educational and hard . . . but educational.

Heidi Latsky: I just want to say . . . we're going to introduce the dancers in a minute. You want to say something too, I know. But I'll say that I also have to work really fast. I don't have a lot of time. I mean, I made Toby's solo in a day, maybe just a couple of hours.

We don't have a lot of time. That's hard. So it's been amazing to me, and somewhat miraculous that we can actually,

like I can sometimes get to the essence. Sometimes I don't think I'm quite there yet. I'm still grappling with my part, which is Meredith -- she was doing my part today.

You have the original cast, like the people who were originally in it and what they brought to it. And then it evolves. For me, as a choreographer, I thought maybe that would be really difficult for me, to let go of the original cast. It really hasn't been.

It's been amazing that I can actually, that I was excited. And I think Lawrence was really excited about it this summer too; it was a completely different cast from the original. And we were . . . Freeze as well. Those of us who were watching from the original GIMP cast were like -- wow, we have something here that can translate onto different bodies.

And so, that was a happy circumstance. So, you wanted to say something?

Male Speaker: Yeah, I was just going to caution people to beware, because it can happen to each and every one of you. Just so you know.

Male Speaker: Hi, I'm Lawrence.

Female Speaker: I'm Toby.

Female Speaker: Hi, I'm Aki Inichiba.

Male Speaker: Hi, I'm Freeze.

Female Speaker: Meredith Bages.

Female Speaker: Christina Briggs.

(applause)

Heidi Latsky: I should also say that, what you didn't see tonight -- besides the lighting, is that we have a prologue to GIMP that features two aerialists. They are in the silks, so they're using the silks in the air. Their red silks. And she has no legs and he is non-disabled. So they kind of embody the essence of GIMP because one of the major definitions of GIMP is -- interwoven fabric.

And again, that was a circumstance where I had three days to work with aerialists. I had never done aerial work before, and they were incredibly generous. And also very open to working something extremely different, because they were kind of from the commercial Disney world space.

You know, like when Jen said to me -- well, can I smile at the audience? And I said -- no. And she said -- well, can I smile at Nate? And I said -- no.

You asked about serious faces, right? I mean, if it was natural for them to smile, yes. But for me, it was more about this organic, like they were kind of one being. And they kind of add something, I think, really special to this piece. And so I just wanted to let you know that that happens as well.

Anything for the dancers?

Female Speaker: Questions, comments? We don't bite.

Male Speaker: Philosophies?

Audience Member: How did you develop your vocabularies, the dance vocabularies that you were using -- the phrases?

Heidi Latsky: I think when we started -- this was like four years ago -- I came in with an arm phrase for Lawrence. And then he tells this story a lot . . . I said -- what else can you do? And he said -- I fall really well.

Male Speaker: She said -- outside of the arm shit, what else can you do? Let's tell the truth.

(laughter)

Heidi Latsky: So it is, it was a big question for me. I mean, what about the non-disabled dancers who, the three of us, the original cast, which is Christina, myself and Freeze -- we're pretty highly-trained technical dancers. And it was a big question of, do I push that or do I get rid of it?

And we all agreed, because we did a lot of talking in those days, that we should push each and everybody's virtuosity, whatever that was for them. And for us, I think for all of us it's been this, finding this balance of being vulnerable and fierce; and then being really physically virtuosic -- and what does that mean?

And how have all of us learned from this process, and how, I know that for me it's still, I'm still trying to figure out what I'm doing out there; and how I can be more vulnerable in

it. And what's my voice? Because I'm just speaking for myself as a performer -- that each and everybody has the ideas that you get to see who we are through movement.

Female Speaker: I know the story from Lawrence, since he told Heidi -- well, I fall really well. So, she takes the things that we know we do well.

Male Speaker: I've always told Lawrence and the rest of the cast, if you don't want to do something every single show -- don't show it to Heidi. Because she'll see it and she'll say -- I want to do that. So, yeah.

Audience Member: For the dancers who are technically trained, and I guess for the choreographer who is part of the original cast -- how has working with people who are not technically trained, had you sort of re-evaluate or question your own training and your own vocabulary; and possibly explore, I guess, ways in which that technical training actually disables you in some way?

Heidi Latsky: That is a great question. Who wants to answer that? He asked if I planted you. No. That's a great question.

Female Speaker: Having, well, it's really hard to find words for me, to answer that; although I feel strongly about that. Every time, personally, when I get up there, I feel like I'm trying to transcend my technical abilities in some way.

I mean, regardless of whether I'm with a trained dancer or a non-trained dancer. Because I just feel what's important to me, what I want to see on stage and what I want to do when I'm on stage is show myself as a human being. And part of something larger; and it's not the tricks that I'm so interested in.

Maybe I've been doing them a long time, so I don't find them so intriguing anymore. But what I find intriguing is the sub-story underneath. Or the sub-feelings underneath. And I feel like dancing with Toby and Lawrence and Akimi -- when I come and relate to them, if I'm doing a duet with Toby, I still have that kind of rapport with her, regardless of my technique.

And yes, sometimes technique gets in the way; sometimes all of the sudden I'm rehearsing and I'm like -- oh, this should be a little more like this. You know? And I have to kind of let go of that, and get back to the real essence of what's happening.

Male Speaker: I know that Heidi yells at us a lot that way, that trained dancers, that we're being too dancer-ly. She'll go -- that's too dancer-ly; we have to change that. Because the disabled dancers, the non-professional, whatever you want to call that -- non-trained dancers, they come with the rawness. An honesty that dancers can just kind of mush over.

I know I like to say they train the humanity out of you in ballet school. And they do a lot. You're supposed to have your



foot here, and your legs there, and it becomes very plastic.  
Leave your emotions at the door, before you walk in.

Heidi Latsky: Well, I worked with actors for 20 years and I also come from, I have a psychology background. So I started dancing, actually, when I was 20. And it was extremely difficult for me to dance. It was extremely hard for me to get into my body, train my body, understand my body.

And I think because it was so hard, when I danced, I was more interesting to look at because that's the feedback that I got; because I was working so hard. I had to learn how to work hard without tension. That was part of my personal journey.

But I learned pretty quickly, and especially having worked with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, where I think the power of that company was in the emotionality of the movement. And the emotionality and the rawness of what we were doing on stage, even though it was fiercely technical.

And so, in my training, my experience is that it's really all physical, and it is all in the training. And the more trained you are . . . if you focus on the right, or on the kind of centering yourself or grounding yourself, then I believe the movement will speak for itself.

But it takes a certain commitment to that. And I do think what these guys were saying is -- it's easy to get lost in your technique, instead of deepening in your technique. And that was

a big question for us. Like I was saying in the beginning of this process.

I think we have to even get deeper into it. So that we can be that much more expressive and show who we really are, through that. And with the disabled performers that I've been working with, or even the non-disabled performers that I've been working with in other pieces, who are not trained -- it's finding physical instruction.

We don't have a lot of time to train in the studio, so it's about really giving them physical direction so that they, too, can become that much more physically expressive in this dance form that GIMP is.

Audience Member: My name is Angel. (inaudible -- out of microphone range) . . . some people were able-bodied and some people were not. But it wasn't always apparent who was abled \_\_\_\_ and I thought that was cool \_\_\_\_ where people with disabilities were helping the able-bodied people, and things like that.

So there is that. There's also like, empowerment for me because \_\_\_\_ like if you're going to stare at me, then it's going to be on my own terms; and so it's a question of who has power or whatever.

And there's also like, challenging in terms of what is socially acceptable; so there's a lot of things that, if you're

disabled and you do it in public, you wouldn't be able to away with doing \_\_\_\_ if I were to do that in public, someone would just come out of nowhere and try to like, catch me.

(laughter)

And then \_\_\_\_ and she'll get back up. Those are some of the things \_\_\_\_ disabled people doing art, really empowering, focusing on what we can do and building coalitions with able-bodied people; and if we build coalitions together we can do beautiful things.

Heidi Latsky: Can we quote you?

(laughter)

Heidi Latsky: I mean, you summed it up. Does anybody want to say anything? I don't think we have a very different intention.

Female Speaker: I think if that's the kind of feedback we're getting, then we're doing our job and we're getting you to think deep thoughts. So it seems to be working. Excellent.

Heidi Latsky: I do have to say that, I mean, everything that you said, I think is our intention. My initial intention, and it's still my intention -- is to make a beautiful piece that resonates. And hopefully it resonates beyond disability and non-disability. But you also can't get away from that either. I mean, that's obviously, there are many themes in the work.

There was a question here.

Audience Member: First of all, thanks for the performance. Could you talk about incorporating, how you came to incorporate the speech that Lawrence delivered, which is really provocative and interesting; and whether that was put there . . . does Lawrence own it?

Or does it get to circulate if he's not there? And how is it received in different locations? Because it feels very, particularly if people aren't English-speaking, different places?

Male Speaker: Just to let you all know, two days ago I was in bed with a fever and I couldn't talk. And for those of you who know me, know how difficult that is.

(laughter)

Julie is laughing a little bit too hard. But I'll do my best. When we first started performing, one of the things we wanted to do was have an open space where people could sort of explore the themes and the visceral reactions that they have, and the emotions that come up.

And what ever else occurs as a result of seeing something like GIMP. And we started noticing, after a while, that we had the same kind of -- no matter what kind of night it was. What city we were in. Whether the performance was on or not on or anything like that -- that there would be certain comments that we kept getting over and over again.

And it almost seemed like, you put a disabled person on stage and people get into this kind of default mode about being brave and courageous and inspiring. Because that's what they've heard 18 billion times before, without really thinking about it.

And so, part of that speech was about saying -- okay, we know that that's out there. Let's have a little fun with it. And maybe if we put it out there, people will think about it differently; maybe they'll check their own reactions. And so, it was an experiment to just see what would happen.

The origins of that speech are great. We were trying to figure it out -- reworking and rewriting. And I was procrastinating a little bit.

And so, we were on the way to Albuquerque to premiere; and we were sitting in the airplane and at 6 A.M., Heidi and I were sitting next to each other. I'm here and Heidi is where Toby would be. And there's a person we don't know sitting on the other side, by the window.

And so, Heidi turns to me and says -- okay, go ahead, give me the speech. So I start out -- I've just got to tell you, I've been watching you.

(laughter)

Heidi Latsky: And I was saying to him, because I wanted him to talk to the audience in a very intimate way. So I said -  
- talk to me. Like, really talk to me.

Male Speaker: So I get all "Barry White" about the thing, right? So after I'm done, Heidi goes -- yeah, it was all right. Tell me again.

(laughter)

Now, after about the third time, the woman is getting really twitchy next to the window . . .

(laughter)

. . . probably hoping she could climb out of it, wondering what was going on. So that was the genesis of that speech. It was to give those thoughts space and then see maybe how they might evolve from there.

Heidi Latsky: I want to say also, I'm really reluctant to use texts on stage. I think it's really scary. But because we had that joke in the beginning, like half a joke, I said to Lawrence -- we need to talk somewhere else. And so I had this idea that there be a conversation between two people.

And we hadn't even finished GIMP and we were on the way to Chicago. This is where the real genesis was. On the plane saying -- well, what could we talk about? We tried jokes. We tried all these different things.

And then we had done these workshops where we were getting what Lawrence said -- that feedback. So we thought -- well, why don't we try that? And we kept throwing stuff in. Like when we

were in Albuquerque, Obama won. That was during the election, and he was saying "Yes, we can."

And so I said -- Lawrence, just put that in there. "Yes we can!" Anyway . . . and we had gotten, actually, really good reactions from it. When we premiered it in New York, I got really nervous and I almost pulled it. And I invited a choreographer, a very good friend of mine to come in.

Because two days before the show I was ready to pull it. And he said -- don't. And I'm really glad I didn't. I kind of thought, maybe I was spoon-feeding. Maybe it was too cute. I just got really nervous about it. Like I said, I get nervous about speaking on stage.

But it has been, I think, really instructive, in a way, to the audience. What we've gotten from people, it's like -- oh, it's like you read our minds. Some people have said that. And it made me feel like -- oh, good, I can think that way. It's like they, somehow it was reinforcing. That's the feedback we've been getting.

Male Speaker: And it varies. Some audiences are kind of sitting there, like -- why is this guy talking to me? And they're not quite sure, especially if it's in an intimate space. It's like -- how they should react. Like some of them might titter and laugh; and maybe others will feel a permission[?]. It really varies from spot to spot and night to night.

Some people talk about it afterwards; sometimes . . . was it Dublin or was it Liverpool -- where there were just like, in the aisles. They were just cracking up.

Heidi Latsky: Liverpool.

Male Speaker: Liverpool. I had to pause because they were . . . so yeah, you just never know how it's going to come across.

Audience Member: I was going to say -- first of all, thank you. That was one of the most wonderful dance concerts I've seen in a very long time. I was going to say that this question comes out of left field, but given the previous question, it's not so much left field.

But I was thinking literally -- left field. That field over there. The interpreter. Because I have never watched an interpreter during a dance concert before. And as I was watching the various interpreters you've had, I realized how incredibly expressive and dancelike their movements are.

(applause)

And I was wondering if you'd ever considered incorporating that into any of your choreography? Having perhaps, with a voice-over for those of us who can't understand sign language? But I was wondering if you had ever thought of that?

Heidi Latsky: Are you talking about in this particular piece . . .



Audience Member: No, I mean, in any piece.

Heidi Latsky: You know, I used to work with a choreographer Keith Young, who I met through Twyla Tharp. And his sister was deaf. And so he signs. And so much of the work that I did with him was based on sign language. And I thought it was the most beautiful gestures.

We did so much of it. And I've always felt that it was such a beautiful language, a really beautiful language. I don't know, I never, I actually hadn't thought of that. In working with Keith, I was certainly influenced. Because I remember, when I did a lot more gestural work, I was incorporating more of what he did, kind of, like what I got from it. Because it was so beautiful.

I have to think. That's a great thought.

Male Speaker: We also didn't run the piece with the interpreters, so when I turned around and I saw this woman, I was like -- who's on stage? And then I realized -- oh, she's interpreting!

(laughter)

And I started thinking -- I hope she's in the right spot, so she doesn't get clobbered by one of the dancers.

(laughter)

Female Speaker: I was worried. I was inching towards one and going . . .

Male Speaker: I know. That's what I was like . . . but the other thing is, I saw this fascinating documentary years ago, and I'll never forget it. I can't remember what country, but it's a country in Central or South America where they took young kids who were deaf, and they just housed them in this orphanage.

And they didn't teach them anything. And the kids came up with this beautiful, beautiful language on their own. And there was a great documentary . . . if I can remember the name of it, Lawrence may know. But there's a great documentary about these kids, where they showed them doing this beautiful interpretive, it is dance. It is dance. It's beautiful.

Audience Member: That gives me a great segue. I've been very interested in the audio description. And I see that as related to the question -- what are you trying to convey? And so what is the audio describer? What are the instructions? What are the decisions?

I went over . . . I'm sorry, I didn't think to listen to it. But I mean, it's an enormous task, and I just wonder how, well, I'd like to hear from her and from you about that?

Female Speaker: Sure. I had. She asked if I had done any other dance interpreting. I'm Andrea. I'm the audio describer. And I think it's something that doesn't get noticed as much as the sign interpreting, because it isn't right out in front of

people. But I think maybe everybody sitting in this area did notice me because I'm speaking into this thing and I'm talking.

But yeah, dance is a particularly difficult task. And there people that used the service, so I welcome everybody's input on this. But I think that for me, as with anything -- if I do theater, if I do dance, if I do anything that I'm describing, I try to focus in on the story.

And I had studied dance, and I am an actress. I've gotten really good at picking out what I think the choreographer or the director is trying to lead the audience, that journey. And I try to highlight those things. This one has particular things that are difficult about it.

And dance, in particular, is hard because people don't have names. And oftentimes people look the same, and so that becomes, that's something that people use a lot. Is that people look similarly and that's part of the beauty of the movement. And so then you have to come up with a way to name or characterize what people look like, so that you can distinguish between the people and what they're doing. And how that movement tells a story.

Pardon? (inaudible question is asked) For today, I did. Yes, as they were all coming in, I basically came up with a naming system for all the different people. It has to be

lightning-quick. So I named each of the people because I don't know any of their names.

Male Speaker: We want to know our names.

(laughter)

Female Speaker: They are very simple. I think, there was The Blonde Dancer. The Brunette Dancer. The Asian Dancer. The Stocky Dancer. And The Disabled Dancer. And then I described the individual . . .

Male Speaker: Talking about The Stocky Dancer . . .

(laughter)

Female Speaker: That's the difference between you and him that I could see. And I described you in more detail as you came in, so that those were your names; but I said -- very strong, obvious musculature, barrel chest. I described each person.

(laughter)

Female Speaker: Please, don't be offended.

Male Speaker: I feel like Joe Pilates. Kidding. Kidding.

Female Speaker: You have to make it up on the spot, and that's basically it. I did have the luck to preview this today and I was like -- wait a minute, I have to come up with really quick ways to identify who these people are and how they moved. That's the other thing.

Like the strength or the power, the integrity of all their movements. So, naming the way that is, and I just sort of do the best I can. I would love to be able to follow them around and describe everything they do, because then I feel like I could be much more specific.

Audience Member: I just wanted to follow that up by saying that, in the University of California this year we had a residential research group that was on Disability Studies and the Humanities. And we're following it up with one that's an arts residency that should be in the summer after next.

It's on description, and bringing in artists to try to work over the course of the week with developing pieces, with people describing right on the spot; that weave in the possibilities of description as the pieces are being developed.

So if you're interested in those questions, I would really just invite you to look for the call sometime next year for that.

Male Speaker: That's very cool.

Heidi Latsky: I think that's a really great idea because then it becomes part of the art. If it's separate, it just seems like it's a very difficult marriage, in a way. But for the artist to actually incorporate it, I think it could be really wonderful.

Female Speaker: I think we're probably running out of time. Should we take one more?

Heidi Latsky: I don't know who's guiding this. Should we take one more question? Okay.

Audience Member: I just wanted to go back to the staring activity. I stare all the time; I'm an artist. But my daughter doesn't like that. And it was so satisfying and intimate to be able to take in the disabled dancers as much as I wanted to, because we have permission in this setting to look and keep looking. And I wondered what it was like, for the disabled dancers, to be on the receiving end of all that seeing?

Male Speaker: Well, people stare at me all the time; I might as well get paid for it.

(laughter and applause)

But seriously, I think putting it on stage does change that dynamic somewhat. If you pay twenty-five bucks to see a show, you better get a good look. And it's fun to play with that dynamic. I mean, we all kind of knew that. I think that's part of the juice of the show. The energy there, because it's playing with one of those sort of taboos.

Female Speaker: And we get to look back at you.

Female Speaker: Yeah, so we are staring back at you, as much as you are staring, I'm staring at you too. If you're going to dare to stare at me, I'm going to stare you back. I

like this, the uncomfortable, like weird space between us and the audience. Both of us staring at each other.

It's kind of uncomfortable. But at the same time, we're kind of like -- look at us. Like, really look at us. And I think it's really interesting, the staring was really an interesting part of me evolving and practicing to be a dancer. Because I was just invited, at the beginning, to be an understudy for someone else.

So I just came into the studio, kind of exploring my body and my movement, and Heidi said -- be vulnerable. Show your emotions and be vulnerable. So I started exploring my emotions of being vulnerable. And it was more internal, intimate things; personal things.

And I started doing that, the solo piece I did in front of the audience. And I realized that it's not necessarily my intimate personal things anymore; because there is the audience adding an extra layer to it, with their interpretation. Then at the time, I really started thinking about how my body is represented on the stage.

Especially being on, when I started I was the only woman of color on the stage. And showing my vulnerability, and it was pleasure for me to explore different kinds of emotion with my body. But at the same time I'm like -- am I feeding into

people's stereotypes? Is that what I want to do as someone in disability studies and disability, a lot of political things.

So it's been, it really made me think a lot. But at the same time, I have a piece where I'm really staring back and being fierce. It kinds of balances out. But the interaction of staring; it's not one-way. Definitely it's both ways and it's going to so many layers; and it's really interesting to be on this side as much as being in the audience sometimes.

Female Speaker: I like that we can show people sometimes, that if they look at us, they can see something beautiful.

Janet Jakobsen: And on that note, I think we should all say thank you to Heidi and the dance company.

(applause)

I want to thank all our speakers, workshop leaders and all of you for coming. Thanks very much. Come back next year.

(end of taping)

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]