

## CHAPTER 10

# The Aesthetic Model of Disability

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**Abstract:** This chapter explores the questions of how and why certain behaviours are perceived as an expression of a disability – and not, for example, as an mic expression – and what role art can play when it comes to constructing and (re) framing disability as a phenomenon. The chapter is based on three field studies conducted at the NewYoungArt [NyUngKunst] festival in Northern Norway during the period 2017–2019, and uses dissemination methodology derived from art-based research and performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; Haseman & Mafe, 2009; McNiff, 2007). The authors’ purpose is to present the “aesthetic model of disability”. This is a new model that clearly deviates from the medical model, but which complements the social model of disability and the Nordic GAP model (Owens, 2015; Shakespeare, 2004). The theoretical framework consists of Ranci ere (2012), Seel (2003) and Dewey (1934), among others. With this chapter, the authors wish to contribute to cultural democracy by identifying an opportunity, through applied art, for people with disabilities.

**Keywords:** aesthetic, democracy, relational, drama, youth, disability model

## Introduction

Aesthetic practices such as applied dramaturgical and theatre projects can help to construct disability, as well as revealing new ways of

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understanding disability within the framework of cultural democracy (Gjærum & Conroy, 2012). This chapter will discuss how disability can be understood as a relational phenomenon by examining field examples (2017–19) from an inclusive arts festival for young people with different abilities (NUK – NyUngKunst). We rely upon a broad and political concept of aesthetics and theories of art evaluation, as well as models and theory related to disability. We explore the question of how and why something appears and is perceived as an expression of a disability – and not, for example, as an expression of art, and what role art can play in reframing disability as a phenomenon. The purpose of this chapter is to present “the aesthetic model of disability”, a new model that can be used as a supplement to the recognized social and relational models of disability (Owens, 2015; Shakespeare, 2004). This model is designed to contribute to cultural democracy by identifying an opportunity within the arts for people with disabilities (Gjærum, 2017).

## **Aesthetic recognition and the distribution of the sensible**

The term “aesthetic” was originally derived from the Greek words “aisthesis” which means sensation or feeling, and “aisthētikos” which means sensory (Baumgarten, 1750). According to Baumgarten, aesthetics is based on mankind’s ability to perceive the entirety of a thing by combining sensory impressions. It can then be understood as a separate knowledge sphere in which the “lower cognitive abilities”, the senses and emotions, prevail (Baumgarten, 1750). Aesthetic knowledge thus functions as a supplement to logical, scientific or intellectual cognition, or the epistemic knowledge form (Gustavsson, 2000).

Baumgarten’s understanding of aesthetics is shared and further developed by several philosophers, including John Dewey, Martin Seel and Jaques Rancière, who all associate aesthetics with recognition and experience. Dewey emphasizes that aesthetic experiences always have an emotional quality, together with a present and relational quality, which binds different sensory impressions together, in an encounter between

the “created”, the “creator”, and the “active recipient” (Dewey, 1934, pp. 201–202). He claims that the aesthetic experience is a holistic one, at once intellectual, practical and emotional. Seel (2003) also distinguishes aesthetic perception from the acquisition of all other knowledge. He defines aesthetics as a science of the appearance of phenomena through our sensory consciousness, and argues that aesthetics should, in a phenomenological way, be based on, and examine, the processes by which these phenomena appear to us. In accordance with Seel, we should therefore explore the moment when art expressions appear to us. Furthermore, we should strive to understand the aesthetic perception in terms of its object (what is sensed), and the aesthetic object in terms of how it is perceived (and by whom). This is because socialized and cultured individuals transfer their understanding and knowledge to the moments of sensory recognition (Seel, 2003).

Rancière expounds on a similar perspective, linking aesthetics to politics, in which he claims that our shared human experience is created and organized by distribution of the sensible – the aesthetic (Rancière, 2012, p. 11). This distribution is the essence of what Rancière believes is the content and experience of politics: The division of time and space, of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise (Rancière, 2012). This distribution represents a “system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (Rancière, 2004, p. 12). The system thus provides guidance for what is imaginable and possible and determines how different phenomena and expressions are presented, as well as how they are interpreted and who is perceived as what, if at all.

In light of the perspectives outlined above, we can argue that aesthetics as a field investigates how different phenomena, from a purely sensory perspective, appear, are classified, and understood by us. Aesthetics is a form of recognition, primarily related to the immediate, to the senses and emotions. Consequently, the aesthetic perspective is available to all people, in all arenas where we feel, experience and recognize – not only in the presence of art and not confined to the field of art at all (Gjørum, 2008, p. 85).

However, in this chapter we will bring to light how art is an arena for the division and distribution of the sensible – a place for knowledge production. This is because artistic disciplines are what Rancière calls modes of action that intervene towards behavior and visibility (Rancière, 2012). Therefore, Rancière suggests that we examine how different artistic practices contribute to the division and distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2012, p. 13). A performative re-distribution can put positions of power into flux by, for example, increasing visibility or giving someone a voice in a public forum (Gjærum, 2017).

In this context, the following questions are posed: how and why is something perceived as an expression of a cognitive or bodily impairment rather than as an expression of art, and what role can art play when it transforms disability as a phenomenon?

## Models of disability

Before moving on to a presentation of field examples, we will examine some existing models of disability. These (like the model we have drafted) do not claim to be theories. They describe the causes and effects of disability (Grue, 2014; Thomas, 2004a; Tøssebro, 2004). In this context, it must be noted that in western culture over the past 60 years, two conflicting perspectives, in particular, have characterized politics, practice, and research on the phenomenon of disability. These perspectives are primarily represented by two models, the medical and the social.<sup>1</sup>

### The medical model

The medical model defines disability as a failure or defect in the individual's isolated body or cognition, caused by an underlying health or genetic condition (Grue, 2014, p. 83; Tøssebro, 2004, p. 3). Disability is understood as an individual problem where the goal is prevention,

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<sup>1</sup> More precisely, we should say that there are several socially informed models, and that these have evolved in different directions in different countries (Thomas, 2004b). However, they all are socially rooted and removed from a purely medical understanding of disability. We therefore refer to the social model in singular form.

treatment or healing (Marks, 1997, p. 86), and the impaired body (including its cognitive function) is defined in contrast to a norm that is assumed to possess a natural superiority (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 19). Historically, both the political and the professional conceptualizations of disability have been based on this medical (normative) mindset, but since the 1970s it has faced increasing resistance in the form of an “environmental turn” (Tøssebro, 2004). This entails a shift in focus from the individual’s isolated body, and towards the environment around the individual.

## The social model

Researchers, activists, politicians and practitioners have gradually become more concerned with aspects of disability beyond the purely psychological and medical, and therefore seek to establish an understanding of disability as a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon (Grue, 2014, p. 71). Representations of disability as a purely bio-medical problem are now being challenged (Grue, 2014, pp. 72–73). Social models are based on the interaction between society and the body, focusing on how societal systems and institutional and structural conditions create and maintain disability (Grue, 2014; Marks, 1997). Disability originates in a discriminatory and exclusionary society, not in the so-called “disabled body” (Marks, 1997; Shakespeare, 2004, p. 9; Tøssebro, 2004). What one might call a “strong” social model (Shakespeare, 2004) breaks the causal link between a medically defined impairment and a socially inflicted disability (Thomas, 2004b, p. 25).

## The relational model

In the Nordic countries, we prefer to employ a third, relational model, often referred to as the “gap model”. Here, disability is located in the gap that arises between an individual’s abilities and the expectations of society or the environment (Tøssebro, 2004). This model differentiates between a “physical impairment” – damage, abnormality, or loss of a body part or one of the body’s functions (Bufdir, 2019) – and a “disability” which describes an encounter with an environment in which the impairment is

experienced as a disadvantage. Disability is understood as a phenomenon dependent on context. If the environment can make accommodations, a person with an impairment does not necessarily have to be disabled (Fylling & Sandvin, 2014, pp. 219–220).

Over the years, all of the above models have been criticized. Because they are models, they ignore key aspects of the construction and experience of disability, such as the embodied experience and conditions associated with the body (Goodley et al., 2018; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Morris, 1991; Owens, 2015; Swain & French, 2000) as well as psycho-emotional forms of disability (Thomas, 2006, p. 182). The models have also been criticized for neglecting people with cognitive disabilities (Chappell et al., 2001; Owens, 2015; Walmsley, 2001, p. 189), which, due to their complex nature, are often difficult to define (Ellingsen & Sandvin, 2014). For the sake of brevity, this chapter will not broadly address this criticism or introduce more models (which do exist). However, in discussing the field examples, we will highlight some aspects and theories related to what one might call the *aesthetic dimension* of disability. These are not emphasized in the models mentioned above, but by artists, art historians, art scientists, linguists, and sociologists, among others. These perspectives are not new. We in no way take credit for their “discovery”, but to our knowledge they have never before been combined into a holistic “aesthetic model of disability”, equal to existing medical, social and relational models.

## Method

This chapter is based on three field studies at the Arctic Arts Festival’s<sup>2</sup> youth initiative NyUngKunst (NUK) in the period 2017–2019.<sup>3</sup> The data

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2 <https://festspillnn.no/nb/informasjon/nuk-ny-ung-kunst/om-nuk>

3 The first author, Nanna Kathrine Edvardsen has, since the fall of 2017 had the main responsibility for the project and the second author, Rikke Gørgens Gjørum, is the initiator of the collaboration as well as the supervisor and co-researcher in the research team. The research team from UiT has consisted of three people in total; the final one being a scientific assistant named Tine Skjold. The second author and scientific assistant have participated in the research project in connection with data production (interview and observation), transcription and dissemination of preliminary findings, and have, in keeping with an action research model/inclusive research, also been involved in parts of the analysis process, together with reference groups and seminar participants. However, it is the first author who has led the process and has undertaken an

material consists in its entirety of observations of art interactive projects and interviews with 43 young participants, 26 artist instructors, 11 companions/family members and 5 administrative staff/supervisors. The Arctic Centre for Welfare and Disability Research began a partnership with Festival Director Maria Utsi in 2016, when she wanted research assistance in the process of changing and developing the festival.<sup>4</sup> Over a period of three years, the researchers prepared an action research project that put inclusion and artistic diversity under the microscope. The research project has evolved to explore and develop the festival's artistic, pedagogical and social opportunities by, among other things, democratically involving the festival's participants (with and without impairments) as "co-action researchers" within an "inclusive research" design (Gjærum & Rasmussen, 2010; Melbøe, 2018).

Although the research project as a whole thus involves individual and collective processes of change where research participants have implemented, evaluated and refined different approaches to art production in diverse groups, the focus in this particular chapter is to examine and compare/discuss three such approaches in connection to how they frame – or reframe – disability as a phenomenon. The processes of change that may or may not have occurred prior to, or because of, these experiences will be presented in the first author's dissertation at UiT in 2022 along with the rest of the data. This chapter examines only one dimension of the data: the aesthetic model of disability. The methodology is derived from the art-based and practice-led-research tradition (Haseman & Mafe, 2009; McNiff, 2007), understood as a staging of data using performative (in this case, linguistic) means, i.e., a form of "performance ethnography" (Denzin, 2003).

Before we begin our discussion of the aesthetic dimension of disability, we will present the field examples. These are entitled: "Scenes from NUK". The scenes are based on observations and interviews done with

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in-depth systematisation and analysis of the data, chosen theoretical perspectives, and written the thesis to which this chapter can be linked.

4 This is not mission research, but a collaborative effort to develop cultural democracy. The research is fully paid for by UiT and is carried out without the need for specific results or reporting. Thus, the researchers have been free to develop organisational, educational, and artistic models, and data-based theories and concepts.

artist-instructors at the festival, and are the result of a data reduction process. In this chapter we have taken some artistic liberties with the source material, deleting and moving content, as well as merging interviews from different people. However, the content retains its original meaning and nothing has been added except for a few linking words and phrases. In all of the scenes there is a recognition and interpretation of the phenomenon of disability through artistic practices which readers might encounter themselves upon entering a dance studio, a music hall, a gallery, or venturing onto a theatre stage.

The chapter now embarks upon a dramaturgical journey through three scenes that represent the study empirically, albeit in a performative and condensed form. In Scene 1, we meet an artist schooled and experienced in the field of performing arts, working at NUK to create a stage-performance with a group of fifteen-or-so differently abled participants and her artistic partner(s). In Scene 2 we meet another artist, this time working a visual performance art practice where the outcome is an interactive exhibition. Finally, in Scene 3, we meet a musician talking about the experience of facilitating music production in a diverse group of participants.

The authors then discuss the scenes through the prism of the theoretical perspective presented initially. In conclusion, the authors answer the chapter's research questions: how and why is something expressed and perceived as an expression of a disability – and not, for example, as an expression of art – and what role art can play as a means of reframing disability as a phenomenon?

## Three scenes

Sneaker-clad feet squeak against linoleum. Old paintbrushes scrape across canvas, glass, wood and styrofoam. A floodlight buzzes over our heads. Pencils scratch against paper. Clicks, clangs, groans and creaks emanate from old objects that are now being cobbled together in new constellations. Human bodies move and breathe, in and out of synchronicity with each other. Words find their way from mouth to audience in a cacophony of different voices. The disjointed tones from an out-of-tune

guitar echo in the corridors. A silent film recorded with a mobile phone broadcasts on repeat against a white wall.

## Scene 1

*The abandoned classroom is small and quite hot.*

The room contains an old piano, a few chairs and some rickety desks that are covered in small written messages and symbols, scratches from keys and other sharp objects and plastered with bullets of dried gum on the undersides. It's late. Almost eleven pm. The soft glow of the midnight sun is creeping through a crack in the blinds. The artist looks a little tired and the researcher is flipping through her notes.

### **Researcher:**

This is an inclusive festival ... how does that affect the artistic expression?

### **Artist:**

You get a different product or result than you would if it was a more homogeneous group. In a way, I think we would have come further. We would have been able to teach them even more if it were a normal youth group.

**(PAUSE)**

It feels very rude to sit here and say that. But that's the reality. Because that's the thing about people with learning disabilities – they usually learn more slowly. They need more time. Then you have the beaming faces here who do their very best, but from a purely artistic standpoint, you will not be able to launch them up into the heavens. They are good, they are rhythmic and everything, but they don't have the agility which is required.

**(PAUSE)**

We found out already on the first day that we had to divide up into smaller groups. Because we noticed that either *they* were bored or the *others* were bored.

### **Researcher:**

In what situations did this happen?

**Artist:**

When we work on specific scenes and give directions. Instruct, make suggestions, play. When it gets too technical or too intellectual. So – that's when people lose their focus.

**Researcher:**

But what exactly becomes too technical and intellectual? What does it consist of?

**Artist:**

No, it's just about having the stamina to stand or sit in one place for a long time, for example. To have one's attention concentrated on a single thing, or to focus on the person who is talking.

**(PAUSE)**

For example, we were standing in a circle, and were going to do exercises that were based on a steady tempo. When it came around to someone with a learning disability, the rhythm stopped. Because they needed more time to think about it or they were uncertain. And then we were like, "Send it on, send it on!" (The artist laughs a bit) So all of these circle exercises became a test of patience for those who were normal-functioning.

**(PAUSE)**

I guess my answer is that if you look only at quality – yes, it goes down a bit.

**(PAUSE)**

I think you actually get a better process. But purely ... artistically ... if you're going to measure ...

## Scene 2

*A silent corner in a shopping mall.*

**Artist:** For example, we really wanted to include a participant who hears things and makes very interesting sounds – which is a deviation, so to speak. We were hoping to work a little bit with those sounds – record them, listen to them, maybe develop and use them in a performative way in the installation.

(PAUSE)

**Artist:** But that's kind of touchy, isn't it? We tried to clear it with her companion first, but he didn't think it was a very good idea. So we let it go. We think it would have been very fun to work a little with that "differentness". We artists generally think that things that are different are a little bit more interesting.

(PAUSE)

**Artist:** But then there is that balance ... that kind of ...

### Scene 3

*In the basement of the old school – musicians guide a diverse group of young participants.*

#### **The artist's story**

Jonas could really play in only one way through a whole song. Constantly the same way. And we got a little frustrated. All attempts to create form and structure were suddenly just exhausting and pointless, and we were not musically motivated. For example, agreeing to add an extra measure or make a sudden stop was hard. Because if *he* didn't add the extra measure, or if *he* just continued playing as usual when everyone else had stopped, well, that didn't sound so good. He affected everything. So then you were constantly asking yourself if you should just abandon the form idea. But then the music gets poorer artistically: smoothed-out and boring and ordinary ... Should you do it? Or should you try to get him to follow? Try to change his playing just a little bit? We ended up making some adjustments. For example, in the middle of these songs we added two measures that were completely without tempo, where we could break up his rhythm a bit, and rebuild it from scratch. There was a section where the music was more floating, where we could play outside of tonality, in a free rhythmic space. So there was this element of "art music" right in the middle of everything. And it was very successful. It was not an emergency solution. Or, maybe it started out that way. But it turned out very well. It was kind of fantastic. Also, a rhythm emerged between Jonas and Torill in one of the songs. Jonas played his regular "dyng – dyng – dyng – dyng"

and then Torill came with her “dyngdyngdyyyyng – dyyyng – dyng”. It was like hearing a railroad crossing or two bells ringing at different speeds. You could imagine the printed notes right in front of you. Five, seven ... five beats against seven beats, four against five. Wow.

## Discussion

In Scene 1, we see how the artist, leading an artistic exercise where several of the participants have a cognitive impairment, experiences that the great physical and cognitive diversity in the group causes the artistic quality to deteriorate. We see in this context that the artist feels that it is in particular the participants with a learning disability who do not achieve at the same level as the “rest”, a group of people the artist calls normal youth. This happens when the performance gets too technical, goes too fast, or when you engage in an activity over a long period of time. Statements like “they don’t have the agility required” and “they need more time for things” substantiate this. We can draw parallels to the medical model, or an individual understanding of disability, as the challenges are located in the individual and identified as a failure or defect in body, cognition, adaptive abilities, traits, etc. These do not harmonize with the stated artistic goals, or the approved methods for achieving them.

The artist thus refers to established craftsmanship or formal quality criteria (Gran, 2014) and to a formal aesthetic art didactic (Aure, 2013), where the aim is to teach already established techniques and skills in order to achieve a specific and qualitatively good result. Because of the artistic practice and the artist’s experience, it can be interpreted not only that there is a clear hierarchy of design and craftsmanship but also that there are traditional norms for the creation and assessment of art. The experience that something becomes qualitatively inferior is directly related to the fact that some individuals do not master these established norms. This type of pedagogy can, generally speaking, be linked to what Rancière calls a “representative art regime”, where art is created, identified, judged and classified according to different representational techniques, and according to fixed principles (Rancière, 2012, p. 27).

Here we can adopt the social model of disability, and assert that it is the artist's pedagogical approach, principles, and understanding of art that is causing a problem, not the young performers. In the exercises and situations referenced above by the artist, environmental and attitudinal barriers arise. It is these that create the disability and contribute to stigmatization and exclusion. By the artist's own account, there is limited room for participation or expression in ways other than those established as "correct". In this situation, we can further argue that the artist's system of self-evident facts of sense perception (his or her categorization of what art is and is not) not only determines the pedagogical approach, but also has an impact on how the project participants' expressions are perceived. Or more precisely, on how they are *not* perceived – namely, as artistic expressions. The artist has a clear concept of what art *can* and *should* be, and how it should be produced. Expressions that fall outside the limits of this classification system are categorized as bad or non-art – or perhaps simply as an expression of a medically defined disability?

In Scene 2, we see that disability as a phenomenon is not merely created on the basis of discourses and philosophical discussions about art, but based on perceptions of what is deviant in a negative sense, as well as what is ethically or morally justifiable. In this scene, we see how the artist and a companion agree not to artistically include the verbal expressions of one of the participants. Both experience it as a delicate topic and a difficult balancing act. One way to interpret this (based on the whole interview as well as observations) is that the artist and companion were afraid to use the sounds of the participant in an art project. Perhaps they wanted to avoid what Colette Conroy refers to as "enfreakment": to make a subject perform as an oddity on the basis of what is considered to be a strange or peculiar trait (Conroy, 2008, p. 342). They may not want to put themselves in the position of staging what is considered by many to be an aberration (hearing voices and making "meaningless" sounds) because they see it as potentially unethical or stigmatizing, i.e., an ethically challenging position – which is also discussed in several studies (Gjærum & Rasmussen, 2010; Hargrave, 2009; Tomlinson, 1982, in Conroy, 2009).

The ensuing ethical debate thus trumps what we might call formal or artisanal criteria when it comes to how a *potential* work of art is judged.

This is related to what Rancière calls the “ethical art regime”. Under such a regime, art should contribute to maintaining a moral standard (Stabell, 2012, p. 49). Art is judged on the basis of instrumental, moral criteria, and is linked to “ethos”, that is, what the majority of society (or authority figures) think is right (Rancière, 2012, p. 25). In this example, we can assume that the artist and the companion do not wish to contribute to further stigmatization of already vulnerable groups.

One could, on the other hand, argue that their actions, or the choice *not* to act, created such a “freak”. As Conroy points out, freaks are created by processes involving cultural consensus and discourses concerning power and normality (Conroy, 2008, p. 342). In keeping with this, those who decide not to use the sounds of the person are so-called “functional” and thus belong to the normative majority. Both of them, by virtue of their positions in society, have the power to define: they exert this power by identifying the participant’s noises as an expression of something abnormal or a disability (cf. a medical model), and frame the person as aberrant or disabled.

Furthermore, we can assert that they determine that not only are the participant’s actions expressions of abnormality, but also take, as a starting point, a common cultural stereotype associated with having a disability: that it is experienced as a loss, or something that is undesirable (Kuppers, 2001, p. 27; Kuppers & Marcus, 2009, p. 143). This exhibits what Swain and French call “the tragedy model of disability”, where disability is viewed as a personal tragedy and an exclusively negative experience (Swain & French, 2000). Gjørnum & Rasmussen also describe prejudice against actors with developmental disabilities in their study of inclusive theatre: “as researchers, ... often coming across people who are prejudiced against the intellectually disabled and who are convinced that the creation of so-called ‘real art’ is beyond their reach. They seem to believe that cognitive shortcomings of intellectually disabled people will inevitably turn any dramatic rehearsal into a kind of social gathering where they can at best practice self-development” (Gjørnum & Rasmussen, 2010, p. 102).

Scene 2 shows how two people belonging to the normative majority, based on a discourse of normality, not only frame disability as a

phenomenon by confirming the prevailing classification of the sensory, but also associate *negative meaning* with the phenomenon. This is instead of presenting disability in accordance with an affirmative model, in which having a disability can also be *positive* (Swain & French, 2000, p. 574). “This means that disability art – audiences included – participates in both the creation and confirmation of disability” (Gjærum & Rasmussen, 2010, p. 111).

The artist (in scene 2) shows an interest in the aesthetic outcome of the scenario that he/she can choose, by pointing out that it could be exciting from a purely artistic standpoint to use the sounds in a performance. However, the perception that it would be problematic wins out. Perhaps in this situation, one could safely assume that the discomfort felt by the artist and the attendant was determining their actions? This is another aspect of the aesthetic dimension of disability: the aesthetic disciplines can be said to trace “the emotions that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies” (Siebers, 2005, p. 542).

The field of Disability Studies emphasizes that aesthetic or sensory appearances, *and how they make us feel*, affect access to economic, social, and political rights, and influence how we act (Harris, 2019, p. 932). Sensory interaction with a physically impaired individual can cause emotional reactions in the form of, for example, discomfort, sadness, and pity (Grue, 2014; Koppers & Marcus, 2009). The so-called *affective* response (Goodley et al., 2018) affects the experience of and interaction with people with disabilities (thus helping to frame disability). For example, a stigma in the larger community can cause people with disabilities to be ontologically invalidated or pathologized (Goodley et al., 2018). Keeping this in mind, the expressions of the individual in Scene 2, which are understood from a pathological perspective to be a medical disorder or a functional impairment, could also be defined as simply one of many possible human expressions that could be staged and presented as art without any problem? If so, could the person then take part in the exercise *as herself* rather than being excluded?

In both Scene 1 and Scene 2 we can see a classification of the sensible that corroborates with what might, among the normative majority and those with discursive power, be the established consensus regarding art

and disability. This tendency is also present in representative and ethical regimes of art where the sensible is distributed in a way that conforms to pre-existing forms of visibility, social structures and hierarchies (Stabell, 2012). Here we can again draw parallels to Rancière, and claim that the artist and the companion function as police – institutions of authority (including individuals) that create and maintain a shared system of sensible self-evident truths, and preserve dominant social norms (Rancière, 2012).

Likewise, in Scene 3 we can identify a policing authority, namely one of the artists leading the ensemble. We read how in his meeting with Jonas, a musician with a learning disability, he was initially frustrated that Jonas could not play within the musical framework originally intended for the ensemble. In this situation, the artist considered trying to get Jonas to accommodate the group and change the way he played in order to follow the planned structure of the music. We can claim that the artist initially operated within a representative art regime, or at least with preconceived notions about what form the art – the musical work – should have. Likewise, we can surmise that he viewed Jonas’s musical expression and/or adaptive ability as a musical challenge, something that could weaken the artistic product. This concurs with the experience of the artist from Scene 1.

However, we see that the artist in scene 3 ultimately chose to change his concept for the song, rather than Jonas changing *his*, which led to unexpected artistic effects. The artist described what arose as “a free rhythmic space” and “an element of art music”, and characterized the event as fantastic. We see, in accordance with an affirmative model of disability, that Jonas’s manner of playing, which was initially perceived as limiting variation and development within the song, instead became a strength, perceived as something positive. The art project got what we might call “a new aesthetic direction” built upon a contribution that the “deviant musician” set in motion. This new aesthetic direction is an aesthetic (communication) process that Gadamer (1986) describes: it occurs when “the game plays the player along”. Thus, a sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) may emerge from those involved (as the artist mentions in scene 3). All of them, including the audience, can have the opportunity to reap

an aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1934). Based on Rancière, we can say that there is a redistribution and re-classification of the sensible, of definitions, structures and hierarchies. In reference to Seel (2003), we can argue that Jonas's playing suddenly appears differently than before.

At this time, we can refer to Rancière's third art regime: the "aesthetic", which, unlike the other two regimes, is based on a reinterpretation of "what constitutes art and what art does" (Rancière, 2012, p. 32). Within Rancière's regime, a deconstruction of the principles of previous regimes takes place, hierarchies are broken down, and the singularity of art is identified. It is freed from specific rules, subject, genre, and art hierarchies (Rancière, 2012, pp. 30–31). The third regime thus contrasts with the others, where one adheres to the usual principles of art production and appraisal, and helps to maintain the status quo regarding the distribution of the sensible. In this aesthetic regime art demands to operate independently of social structures and classifications (Stabell, 2012, p. 50), thus presenting new ways to categorize and participate, to challenge the prevalent political and moral order.

This is exactly what occurs in Scene 3. What could have been presented as a tragic personal flaw, a challenge, or a lack of skills and abilities, was instead presented as "art music". The way Jonas played was no longer perceived or portrayed as wrong or bad, but carried the potential for artistic innovation and creative design – and it was appreciated. This, in turn, has an impact on how Jonas is categorized: namely, as an artist – a resource, and not as a disabled person, an interpretation that is consistent with previous research on art and disability (Gürgens, 2004; Ineland, 2007; Sauer, 2004).

## The aesthetic model

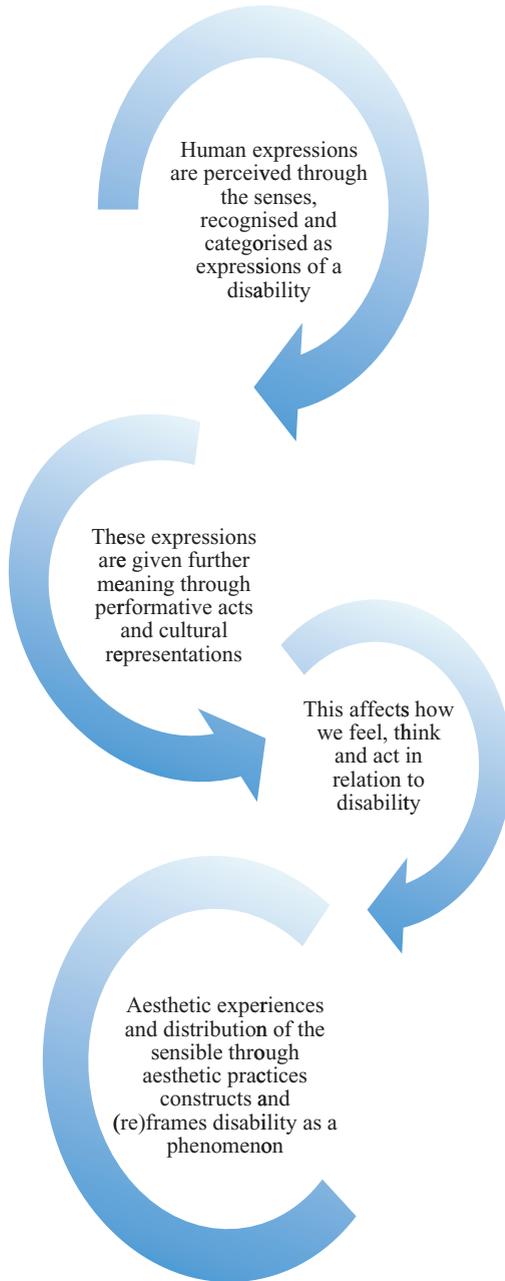
Disability can thus appear as an aesthetic phenomenon, which we have now observed through a discussion of three scenes. The phenomenon is created and understood by association with and distribution of the sensible, based on how physical, cognitive, and linguistic expressions appear, are experienced, and are presented aesthetically. This can be visualized in a model (see Figure 1). As we see from the model, disability occurs

when human expressions or actions are perceived and recognized aesthetically as expressions of precisely that – categorized as, for example, social, physical, or cognitive aberrations or challenges, or they are given negative meaning. The phenomenon is additionally framed when these expressions or actions are then staged as expressions of a disability, or are imbued with a narrative and with connotations that confirm and support a “disability” categorization, according to cultural norms.

As we know, the physically disabled body has social, cultural, and historical meanings (Goodley et al., 2018, p. 208), and cultural representations can confirm or reject these, as well as lead to further debate about the nature of disability (Grue, 2014). Cultural representations can, for example, support the medical perspective and present disability as an injury, a deficiency or a personal tragedy.

Aesthetic experiences engage us emotionally, which can lead to an affective response in the face of staged performances or other cultural representations of disability. As Goodley et al. and Harris point out, affect is deeply rooted in social and cultural norms (Goodley et al., 2018; Harris, 2019). If we draw parallels to the aesthetics theory presented at the outset of this chapter, we can argue that cultural (including artistic) representations thus contribute to the distribution of the sensible, because they shape what we see, think, feel, and then *do* with regard to disability. Consequently, they help to delineate and make sense of the phenomenon – that is, to *frame* or *construct* it.

Additionally, this model implies that aesthetic practices can also *reframe* disability as a phenomenon. This can be accomplished by classifying and presenting human expressions and actions in a manner that challenges existing systems and categorizations. What was previously defined as a spasm, an expression of sickness, can now be defined as an interesting artistic quality, as an invitation to dance (Gjørnum, 2004; Gjørnum & Rasmussen, 2010). For example, cultural representation through visual arts, film, theatre, or literature, attributes meaning and narrative to the disabled body (Garland-Thomson, 2017; Grue, 2014). As Kupperts points out, pre-existing narratives can be challenged by the way artists with disabilities present themselves (Kupperts, 2001, p. 93). This is because disability, according to Judith Butler’s theories of performed acts



**Figure 1** The aesthetic model

(Butler, 1988), is something that is *done*, or *performed*, partly based on social and cultural expectations and norms.

## Summary

We have now illustrated how and why something can be perceived as an expression of a disability – and not, for example, as an expression of art. We have discussed what role applied art can play as a vehicle for reframing disability as a phenomenon. This chapter has shown that artistic practices (applied arts) can either confirm existing interpretations of disability, or they can negotiate new identities, narratives and categorizations.<sup>5</sup> Such progressive/innovative artistic practices may lead to increased equality for people with disabilities, as pointed out by, among others, sociologist and theologian Nancy Eiesland (Eiesland, 1994, p. 98, in Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 525). Applied art can, by introducing or molding sensory forms, challenge or confirm the present division and distribution of the sensible. Artistic practices shape how we think, act, and feel about disability. They can also help open or close windows of opportunity for participation and inclusion, and promote or inhibit cultural democracy.

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5 This “potential of art” is supported, among others, by the authors of the article Vulnerable Spaces of Co Production: Confronting Predefined Categories through Arts Interventions (2020).

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