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**Rolling the Boards:**  
**The interplay of representation and recruitment in disability**  
**casting in UK theatre and television**

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~

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**Declaration**

I confirm that this thesis is all my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Early empirical findings were given in a paper to the Body Productive conference held at Birkbeck College, University of London in December 2018.

## Abstract

The prevalence of conversations about disability casting in public discourse, and journalism, is not matched in scholarship. This is the case regarding considerations of disability in relation to performance work more generally. This thesis addresses this academic absence in the country-specific context of the UK theatre and television industries. The discussion ranges from individual conventions, such as ‘cripping up’ (Kaite O’Reilly qtd. in Komporály 2005) or ‘disability drag’ (Siebers 2004), the casting of non-disabled performers as disabled characters, to wider examinations of disability as an employment issue in theatre and television. Utilising a multidisciplinary approach, its focus rests on the interplay of productions’ representational qualities with the recruitment and labour processes behind them. It spans theatre and performance studies and disability studies, and incorporates aspects of industrial relations, combining the sociological slants on performance of Goffman (1956, 1959) and Garland-Thomson (1997, 2009), with the occupational perspective of Dean (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b), and humanities perspectives of Graver (1997) and Hadley (2014). This framework queries the paradox of disability’s inherent, quotidian performativity and its relative absence in professional arenas of performance.

From here, the thesis details a study situating interview contributions of disabled and non-disabled practitioners across the sectors, within text- and performance-based analysis of three shows: Touretteshero’s production of Beckett’s *Not I* (2017, 2018), the West End megamusical, *Wicked* (2006-present), and the BBC period drama, *Call the Midwife* (2012-present). These examinations outline the current position of disability as an employment issue in UK theatre and television, along with its place within the wider sociopolitical context. The thesis expands particularly on Dean’s (2005, 2007) positioning of professional performers as formal and informal ‘proxies’ for the public they represent, to add disability as a category in this formulation of the socioeconomic functions of performance work.

**Abbreviations**

AM: Access manager

CA: Casting assistant

CD: Casting director

D: Director

DS: Drama school

NCD: National Creative Diversity

P: Performer

Pr: Producer

W: Writer

## Chapter One

### Introduction

'We are only as powerful as the stories we tell. We have not always been able to tell them.' – *Emilia*, by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm

Disabled people form eighteen percent of the working age population in the UK (Papworth Trust 2018 10). The narratives of this wider society are chronicled in, and constituted by, literature, theatre, television and film, in which we are frequently represented as characters (cf. Mitchell and Snyder 2000). However, these two statements are not often connected, as disabled performers and practitioners continue to be *under-represented* as workers in the creative industries. Moreover, the nature of the representation provided can have a significant impact, both on performers' careers and the lives of other disabled people. As crystallised in the epigraph to this introduction, the central concern of this thesis is the connection between the stories that are being told and the people who tell them. It explores the disjunction between, and interplay of, representation and recruitment in disability casting – terms which are defined below. Combining in-depth interviews with disabled and non-disabled practitioners and other significant professionals with text- and performance-based analysis of productions (two theatre and one television), it situates disability as an employment issue within UK theatre and television.

In examining this interplay of representation and recruitment in the context of disability casting, the study has at its heart the conception of performance as an occupation, which, as Dean suggests

is an important and useful site for the study of social inequalities and employment. Performers' work represents us to ourselves through a variety of media and therefore their working realities (how, why and when they get jobs) represent more than their own experiences as workers. (2008b 8)

It explores conventions ranging from the practice of casting non-disabled performers as disabled characters (cf. Johnston 2016; Black and Pretes 2007; Kupperts 2007),

colloquially termed ‘cripping up’ after Kaite O’Reilly (qtd. in Komporály 2005), to difficulties around disclosure. It investigates the implications and complexities of such conventions to ask whether theatre and television are properly fulfilling what are said to be their roles (cf. Dolan 2013) and accurately representing us to ourselves. From here, in line with Dean above, it explores the ‘working realities’ that surround disability and impairment in UK theatre and television (for both disabled and non-disabled performers, as well as ‘employment gatekeepers’, such as directors and producers) through examining participants’ responses. Cognisant of performers’ proposed position as ‘proxies’ for wider society (Dean 2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b), it analyses the impact of disability on this formulation of their potential, and the ways it might augment or complicate such a conception. This means the project revolves around a dual understanding of representation – one that ‘considers how a story is cast and structured rather than just narrating plot and theme’ (Dolan 2013 4). This dual definition is interrogated below, following an examination of the wider context for the study.

### ***Wider context and societal links***

Having begun by stating disabled people’s parallel presence as a significant social group and as a frequent representational recourse when it comes to fictional characters, but articulating our relative absence from providing that representation as creatives, it is important to consider some of the wider societal structures which result in that apparent paradox. The first is that, due to some historical associations of bodily and cognitive difference with lack and misfortune (cf. Garland-Thomson 1997), there has been a tendency to render disability as a predominantly clinical issue to be remedied. This is widely termed the medical model (cf. Oliver 1983, 1990) and is elaborated on in Chapter Two. Its implications include a reluctance to situate disability alongside other minority groups and kinds of diversity as social justice issues, where disability then arises from interaction with environments and attitudes. The second is that the excessive signification of our physical presence is not ‘read’ on its own terms (cf. Mitchell and Snyder 2000; Quayson 2007), even in everyday interactions (cf. Hadley 2014). These combined factors have a significant impact on our lived experience, meaning that ‘disabled people’s marginalization has occurred in the midst of a perpetual

circulation of [our] images' (Mitchell and Snyder 2000 6). This renders us paradoxically very present and extremely absent in popular consciousness. The qualities of this contradiction are discussed further below, as well as in Chapter Two, but it is first important to note its very quantifiable effects in the UK consciousness. Most starkly, there are 4.2 million disabled people living in poverty (The Papworth Trust 2018 10). Related to employment, the wage gap between disabled and non-disabled full-time workers is at 12.6 percent (2018 5). This is consistent with Wilson-Kovacs et al.'s (2008) observation that 'disabled people continue to be over-represented in lower paid service jobs and under-represented in better paid managerial and professional positions' (705). These combined statistics illustrate issues around aspiration, which are striking alongside the knowledge that seven percent of children in the UK are disabled, and ten percent live in families with at least one disabled child (The Papworth Trust 2018 20). The figures correlate with discussions during my interviews where the significance of either positive or negative representation for sense of self and of future possibilities was a prominent thread. This also evokes Jill Dolan's (2013) suggestion that '[t]heatre and film show us ourselves in relation to others, or more damagingly, they persuade us of our social invisibility by not representing us at all' (2), along with her evocation of '[t]he power of recognition – of seeing a life that looks something like yours on stage' (2).

The significance of this perspective to my eventual thesis is discussed below. First it is important to outline the project's background. For, such observations of social paradoxes as mentioned thus far, and especially the highly performative presence of disabled bodies, were behind my initial interest in the fact that issues (perceived or actual) around accessibility, as well as availability, seem to promote a predominance of non-disabled performers being cast as disabled characters. For, as noted by Mitchell and Snyder (2000), this results in relatively frequent instances of representation (of a sort) – ranging from Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* to more popularly recognised examples like Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man* – but does not necessarily equate to associated opportunities for recruitment. Indeed, often the opposite is true, as 'cripping up', the 'ability' to portray disability and impairment, has come to be one of the most readily-rewarded aspects of performers' skill sets. Statistics for this convention are more easily available in the US context than the UK one, with

16% of all Best Actor and Actress Oscar wins going to non-disabled performers for disabled roles (cf. BBC News 08/10/2018), in comparison to the single disclosed win for Marlee Matlin as a Deaf actress. However, as noted above and discussed in Chapter Two, there is a lack of research specific to this topic. Moreover, the positioning of Matlin's success as the single *disclosed* win emphasises how important it is to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the lived experiences of disabled people when considering what constitutes representation.

These combined aspects resulted in an expansion of my research area, to consider the connection of casting conventions around disability and impairment to consequent representation, more generally. The study thereby became interdisciplinary, because the crux of its enquiry (the intertwining of, and interplay between, representation and recruitment) necessitated a consideration of social and occupational factors along with artistic elements like performance techniques and scripts. The impetuses for, and implications of, this approach are elaborated in Chapters Two and Three, with particular regard for Tom Shakespeare's (2014) request to 'make space for historical and cultural investigations, but alongside empirical social research on the lives of disabled people and the disabling barriers that they experience' (52). Its relevance here is that it results from a connection of these two aspects which I am arguing, following Dean (2008b 8) above, is intrinsic and therefore positions them as inextricable. Further, I suggest that disability is the site at which their connection becomes most prominent and palpable. Conversations with participants gave repeated reminders that representation (an ostensibly artistic or aesthetic concern) has a bearing on recruitment (an apparently occupational and social one) and vice versa. This is the central tenet of this thesis' discussion, underscored by a subset of several other pertinent themes. These form the substance of the next section.

### ***Central themes***

Having articulated this synthesis at the centre of creative careers, the most pertinent point to this study is that it occurs in a single space, indeed a single entity: what David Graver terms 'the actor's body' (1997), and I, after Dean (2005, 2007, 2008a, 2008b and later), refer to as the *performer's* body. This means that, fundamentally, any attempt at

splitting the realms of representation and recruitment with regards to creative practice would be at best an unhelpful disjunction and at worst false. Not to mention, following Hadley's (2014) formulation of the 'unconscious performance' of impairment in public space, probably impossible. This probable impossibility is most evident in the case of visibly disabled bodies such as mine and those of many of my participants, since, as Hadley (2014) observes, '[f]or people with disabilities, daily interactions in social situations, spaces and places can feel like a series of performances in which [our] idiosyncrasies are, whether [we] like it or not, on show' (1). Nevertheless, despite the popular foregrounding of their interlinked qualities, in scholarship, the disjunction between comprehension (and analysis) of recruitment and representation appears to have remained thus far, especially in relation to disability. Whilst Dolan (2013) does make brief reference to 'how a story is cast' (4), it is not explicitly connected to employment. This absence sparked my initial wariness to position it as the crux of this eventual project. However, to avoid it would have done a disservice to the people who gave their stories to my study; and also renege on my responsibilities as a researcher to report (to *represent*) my findings accurately and in the appropriate frame.

### ***The power of embodied examples***

Here, then, rests the multiple resonances of the epigraph to this introductory chapter. Firstly, the quotation by itself invokes not just 'the stories we tell' but the *people* who 'have not always been able to tell them'. Secondly, when placed in its wider context as part of the recent productions of *Emilia* (Shakespeare's Globe 2018, Vaudeville Theatre 2019), it becomes even more specifically relevant. This show is a meta-theatrical and multimodal semi-biography of Emilia Lanier (née Bassano, contemporary of Shakespeare but more importantly author of one of the first published poetry collections by a woman, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* [1611]). It melds past and present to connect the so-called dramatic canon with contemporary concepts of creativity; questioning established conventions of theatre, history, and cultural representation.

Moreover, it does so through its performance as well as its form and content. As the playwright Morgan Lloyd Malcolm states in 'A note on the text', '[t]his play was written to be performed by an all-female cast of diverse women. It would not be the same play if

this is ignored.’ I would argue that the presence of such an instruction in the published script evokes the labour processes of all practitioners involved in the initial productions, as well as the continued commitment of the creative team to ensuring that original, essential impetus for the play as commissioned by the Globe is preserved. The printed presence of this comment crystallises the importance of diversity to, and in, the show. Furthermore, the nature of the original cast (including Deaf actor Sophie Stone and disabled performer Nadia Albina in the ensemble as well as three women of colour sharing the central role of Emilia) emphasises that the play’s particular *definition* of diversity is intersectional and encompasses disability and impairment. Additionally, the ensemble nature of the cast required for productions means that the inclusion of disability under the umbrella term of diversity is not predicated on these performers fulfilling particular purposes, but rather taking on a whole range of roles. This ensures disability is at once integral to the representational quality of the piece and entirely incidental to the plot. Such a combination is among the ultimate aims for representation and recruitment in relation to disability casting worldwide, according to the sparse scholarship on the subject surveyed in Chapter Two, such as Black and Pretes’ (2007) survey of Hollywood’s representational tropes. It also features prominently in the feedback from interviewees, including those working in casting.

In containing this highly-prized feature, *Emilia* might therefore be positioned as an example of good practice. However, these same positive aspects mean it is difficult to select particular parts for analysis beyond the stage pictures created by the collaboration of the original ensemble cast. This is especially evident with regards to the incidental quality of the inclusion of impairment and the lack of any specific reference to it within the script. Perhaps this is the precise point of the play. In a powerful paradox, the pervasive presence of such intersectional diversity renders it almost absent as an issue for either recruitment or representation. Yet this, combined with its relatively recent run, made it a complex choice for analysis alongside data from interviews, in terms of my research capacity for this thesis. Consequently, it instead provides a foundational structure for the introduction and conclusion.

This concept of foundations relates to a third reference point for the epigraph’s resonance to this project. *Emilia* was a commission by Shakespeare’s Globe, on the subject of one of his female contemporaries. It resulted in a newly-written play of an

avowedly intersectional feminist nature (a perspective which in turn forms part of Chapter Three's methodology). That play was originally produced in a prominent UK creative institution centred on a cornerstone of the so-called dramatic canon. This signalled an acknowledgement of the need for significant structural change with regards to both representation and recruitment in the industry. Furthermore, the particular environment of the Globe's main theatre space meant that the wider definition of diversity stipulated by the script and casting could also be encompassed in the audience. The Globe offers an open air, shared light auditorium with multiple options for perspective on performances. These range from sitting to standing to the provision of wheelchair spaces in the Gallery as well as ramps onto raised platforms in the Yard. There is also appropriate access support for other impairments.

Following the positive response to the initial production, it was striking that the highly-anticipated transfer went to the Vaudeville Theatre. Much to the dismay of the cast and creative team (from personal conversations), this venue was beset with a variety of access issues. These included extremely restricted wheelchair access along with a lack of initial scheduling for captioned, British Sign Language interpreted, or audio-described performances. The contrast in available provision between venues hosting the same production was stark. By articulating the importance of access for representation and recruitment, the production's essence made these contradictions especially apparent. Some of the groups who had been, and could be, most impacted by its message were unable to access this second space. However, far more than a mere critical comment, this observation recognises the complex negotiations necessary in navigating this country's creative industries. It emphasises how positive progress may also function as a reminder of how much work (in all senses of that word) remains to be done.

### ***Gaps and binaries***

The gap between current practice and the ideal position of disability in theatre and television suggested by the final observation on *Emilia* is paralleled across the study by repeated reference to other gaps. For, the relative absence of academic discussion around performance work more generally and in the specific context of disability

casting emphasises a wider gap in comprehension of the connection between representation and recruitment. This is in turn evident in the split between the inherent performativity of disability and impairment in everyday life put forward by Hadley (2014) and our relative under-representation as professional practitioners, especially in 'mainstream' performance arenas. In his analysis beyond disability, Kershaw (2013 [1992]) terms such venues and companies 'established sectors of the British theatre industry' (7), in contrast to those which are 'to a greater or lesser degree, ideologically oppositional, politically and/or socially and/or culturally radical' (245). However, this evinces another gap, in the split between so-called 'mainstream' and 'disability-led' arts, which connects to a perceived gap between the experiences, and consequent practice, of disabled and non-disabled people.

Following Kershaw (2013 [1992] and 2013 [1999]), this perceived binary is troubled throughout the thesis. It is mirrored by a further split which is similarly troubled, and similarly central – the split between disciplines; most prominently theatre studies and employment relations. To facilitate an investigation of the position of disability as an employment issue, it was necessary to combine perspectives. In particular, the industrial relations scholarship of Dean (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b and later) and the sociological perspective of Goffman (1956, 1959) is combined with the theatre-based work of Hadley (2014). This reflects the fact that this thesis' focus thus stems from a personal professional, and academic, fascination with the paradox produced by our inherent performativity and our relative absence in mainstream performance *work* – grounded in my own living reality (and 'working reality') of *rolling* the boards in my powered wheelchair alongside Cerebral Palsy. It also explains my combination of empirical data with text- and performance-based analyses of two theatre productions and one television show. These analyses (detailed below) exemplify key aspects of, and issues with, current structures, conventions and conversations around disability and impairment within the UK creative industries. Through examining the combination of their representational qualities and the labour processes behind them, the thesis emphasises the interplay between representation and recruitment which is rendered particularly pertinent by the presences, and practicalities, of disability casting. It also begins to examine another binary – the different sectors of theatre and television.

### ***What constitutes representation?***

The evocation of splits also raises their presence of their opposite – connection and collaboration alongside a multiplicity of perspectives. This requires engagement with the question of what constitutes representation, not least because, as already observed, on first consideration there are a plethora of examples of cultural products in which disability and impairment feature prominently. It also evokes discussions in theatre (and performance) studies beyond the context of disability. For where Jill Dolan (2013) underscores the need ‘to see what and who is stunningly, repeatedly evident and what and who is devastatingly, obviously invisible’ (2), Peggy Phelan (2005 [1996]) holds it as imperative to examine ‘the implicit assumptions about the connections between representational visibility and political power’ (1). This latter perspective links slightly to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s (1997) perspective referenced in Chapter Two, on the combined hypervisibility and invisibility of disabled bodies and the ways this markedness often precludes our representational capacity. However, neither Dolan nor Phelan make productive recourse to disability. Indeed both scholars use it as a metaphor, whether generally through the sight-centric nature of their language (with Phelan [2005, 1996] in particular framing her argument as a dichotomy of sight and blindness throughout) or in more specific moments. For instance Phelan (2005 [1996]) suggests that, in questions about the veracity of images, ‘[d]oubt can be temporarily overcome by belief, that old and slightly arthritic leap of faith’ (1). Similarly Dolan (2013) comments on a (non-disabled) performer’s technique in a solo piece not related to disability as follows: ‘spastic, but supremely controlled, finally dancerly style’ (18). Moreover, when outlining feminist approaches to representation, she highlights an interest in how characters ‘perform gender, sexuality, race, and class’ (13) and only suggests that a story might be about a ‘differently abled’ person (194) in her final chapter. Therefore, whilst I must acknowledge the importance of their work to scholarship more widely, I do not refer to either beyond the beginning of this thesis.

Nevertheless it is vital to address the existence of other kinds of theatrical representation beyond the historical recourse to mimesis (which has led some activists to call the practice of ‘cripping up’, ‘disability mimicry’ through a linguistic derivation of the term). Indeed, as discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two, many D/deaf and disabled artists and companies making their own work (both inside and outside the UK)

actively push back against the convention, and some veer towards Live Art instead of theatre. However, in considering disability as a *recruitment* issue in the wider arts sector, this study is particularly interested in work *not* created by performers themselves. Consequently it is for a future project to parse the significance of Live Art in an employment context.

From this background, queries about what constitute representation might, and perhaps ought, to be positioned alongside the heterogeneity of lived experience among disabled people – and also the binary mentioned previously with regards to connection between disabled and non-disabled people. This point, and associated observations about disclosure of impairment in recruitment contexts, are both riven throughout the empirical data presented, and frequently closely connected with each other. They are also raised in relation to responsibility, and who ought to make changes. The first issue is brought out by repeated references to an awareness of the range of differences in disabilities and impairments, and also even in individual experience. This has clear significance for the distinction between the medical and social models of disability, outlined above, but is also complicated by the contributions of participants and by my parallel experiences as researcher conducting the project.

This emphasises not only the spectrum *within* the disabled community but the blurred boundaries around it, which brings into relief the frequent necessity for disabled people to engage with non-disabled people in both the industry and society more generally. Consequently, it is associated with the coexistence of senses of facilitation and frustration, which are riven throughout the thesis. It thereby connects to the final prominent theme, which both serves to situate my study and to complicate that situation – by further explicating the previously drawn binary between ‘mainstream’ and ‘disability-led’ arts.

### ***Mainstream vs. Disability Arts***

Whilst this thesis’ choice of productions for analyses (detailed below) might nominally situate it as most concerned with the so-called ‘mainstream’ perspective, a consideration of employment opportunities for disabled people in the industry must necessarily encompass both arenas – and indeed trouble their seeming separation. This

is consistent with participants' contributions, and with the aforementioned heterogeneity of disabled people's lived experiences, but it also allows for situation of the professional perspectives and practice of companies like Graeae, whom Kershaw (2013 [1992]) includes in his analysis of 'the possible usefulness of theatre to particular communities' (3). Graeae, perhaps the most well-known D/deaf and disabled-led theatre company in the UK, has been pushing such definitional boundaries since its formation in 1980. Although political elements of some of its productions mean it is still readily associated with 'disability' arts, as well as the wider disability movement discussed in Chapter Two, its work with other organisations (and in other countries) troubles this placement, in line with Kershaw's (2013 [1992]) assessment that some community companies 'acted as a kind of conduit through which the most effective theatrical innovations, and some of the most talented practitioners, of alternative theatre could be brought within the sphere of the main companies' (136). Moreover, the working relationship of its founders (Nabil Shaban and Richard Tomlinson) fundamentally disrupts the earlier separation of disabled and non-disabled experience. Shaban and Tomlinson, who met as respective student and tutor at Hereward College in Coventry (and thereby replicated the connections of many performers and practitioners interested in disability, including mine with some of my participants), used their collaborative connection to secure the initial success of the company. Indeed, Graeae's name itself evokes such a collaborative essence, being a reference to Greek mythology. The shared experience of the Graeae sisters, having a single eye and tooth between them, illustrates how ephemeral and fluid aspects of impairment can be, and that this is dependent on a range of factors from environment to attitude. It is therefore pertinent to participants pointing to the reciprocal relationships which are central to many disabled people's lives and the possibility that these might translate or transfer to a predisposition towards the similarly collaborative situations found in theatre and television.

Whilst this once again evokes the social model, it also emphasises how wider comprehension of disability and impairment experiences might facilitate a better professional environment for all practitioners, by pointing towards an *artistic* as well as practical approach. It is termed 'the Aesthetics of Access' and refers to the creative embedding of access support for performers and audiences within the fabric of

productions. It additionally refers to ethos in the formulation and rehearsal of productions. It is examined more specifically in Chapter Four, but broadly it includes provision across as wide as possible a range of access requirements – rather than a focus on impairment. In encompassing audio description, British Sign Language interpretation (and other sign languages alongside Graeae’s international work), creative captioning and a myriad of other possibilities, it emphasises the variety of considerations necessary to promote what might be posed as ‘full’ accessibility; a concept whose implications and practicalities reappear repeatedly in the rest of the thesis. Secondly, and perhaps conversely, it underscores the *possibility* of such provision, even with a seemingly wide range of ‘impairment effects’ (Thomas 1999). Thirdly, the flexibility of the rehearsal and workshop processes in particular illustrates how an inclusive environment offers space for aspects of accommodation which might not initially be perceived as required by participants or practitioners – but which become apparent during the creative process. Finally, in a way which links the above outline to each of the text- and performance-based analyses of productions, it illustrates that such extensive provision ensures that accessibility is integral rather than incidental. From here, then, it is important to delineate the choice of these productions.

### ***Choice of productions***

Having initially removed any text-and-performance analysis once the focus shifted to employment, a recurring theme within early empirical data was participants using examples of shows either to promote good practice, or to highlight the possibility of using *difficult* practice as helpful starting points for constructive conversation about change. This propensity, alongside my growing comprehension of the connection between representation and recruitment, led me to adopt a similar strategy in my structuring of this study’s findings.

The three shows chosen for analysis, namely Touretteshero’s recent reimagining of Samuel Beckett’s *Not I*, the popular musical *Wicked* and the BBC primetime period drama *Call the Midwife*, each engage with the dynamics of the industry with regards to disability in a variety of ways. Consequently, after Kershaw (2013 [1992]), I analyse ‘the potential efficacy of their theatre [and television]—both in itself and as part of the wider

cultural history—through an investigation of the conditions they chose and created for performance’ (243). Together the productions chart the trajectory between the ‘radical’ and ‘mainstream’ perspectives proposed by Kershaw (2013 [1999]), and blur such boundaries, as well as facilitating an examination of the differences and similarities between the sectors of theatre and television. Individually, they either promote what seems to be more positive practice (*Not I* and *Call the Midwife*), or function as a frame in which to situate more difficult aspects (*Wicked*). I have therefore allowed them to serve as similar framing devices for each of the chapters relating to empirical interview data as *Emilia* is for the whole thesis. This strategy, and the reasons behind it, is discussed in more detail in relation to Chapter Three’s methodological framework. The frame of the rest of the study is now outlined.

### ***Structure***

Having explored the initial impetus, and broader contextual background, of this study, the structure of reporting is set out as follows. Chapter Two expands on the contextual analysis to review literature in the relevant fields and related topics, as well as examples of practice from several companies. It surveys current scholarship across theatre studies, industrial relations (especially work and employment relations) and disability studies. This illustrates points of use as well as the conceptual and empirical gaps with regards to considering disability as an employment issue in performance work. These aspects are articulated across four sections. They begin with models of disability and related theoretical perspectives, examining the origins and implications of the aforementioned medical and social models of disability, alongside three alternative formulations and some additional relevant criticism. It then carries the concepts at the crux of these theories forward into the other three sections. These constitute a consideration of disability in relation to employment; theatre and television in relation to employment; and disability in relation to theatre and television and employment. A particularly pertinent issue in an employment context is the difference in approach (both in legislation and organisational response) to disability and impairment in comparison to other minority groups. This is in part due to their relative heterogeneity

as a category, but is compounded by the particular disadvantaging impact of financial and social expectations, especially concepts of productive or problematic workers.

This is then explored alongside the ways in which disabled people's everyday experiences do or do not translate into the specificities of performance work, and wider ideas of performers as group representatives who carry specific symbolism. Concurrently, it aims to forge synergies between each of the areas considered, particularly conceptually, through the combination of occupational, sociological and humanities-based perspectives. The thread connecting each of these is the idea that the disabled person is marked out as different and not widely considered productive either representationally or in terms of recruitment.

Chapter Three takes up these synergies to complicate them and describe the theoretical bases for, and the design of, the methodological framework for the study. It also explores the practical implications, and logistics, of conducting the study, alongside issues of reflexivity, and debates around self-situation in scholarship. In this way it functions as a reflection on, and of, many of the issues raised by participants in the later empirical chapters, by exploring the manner in which my experiences as researcher not only connected with but sometimes coalesced with those they contributed in the narratives of their careers as practitioners. This especially includes my experience of 'snowball sampling' (cf. Morgan 2008), the process of using a set of initial contacts to facilitate wider introductions to interviewees, and its parallel of practitioners' encounters with 'employment gatekeepers' in the industry. Discussion particularly engages with the use of technology to facilitate accessibility, issues around identification and disclosure and the inherent necessity of collaboration underpinning what was nominally an individual study through work with academic and personal assistants on both my side and that of the participants.

Following these foundational chapters, Chapter Four begins the combined presentation of empirical data from interviews and the text- and performance-based analysis of shows by examining the impact and import of Touretteshero's *Not I* (2017 onwards). Alongside this, it begins a trajectory from the 'radical' towards the 'mainstream'. This engages with the concept of the dramatic canon, foregrounding the combined empirical and methodological focus on ideas around authorship, ownership and representation. It

also considers the placement of this kind of production in a venue like Battersea Arts Centre, or at the Edinburgh Fringe. The representational qualities of the text, steeped as it is in the mythologies of prior productions, are not immediately obvious. Yet this is its primary pertinence for this project. The juxtaposition of this history with the striking sense of connection which is emphasised by this particular reimagining allows for an analysis of issues around various different kinds of accessibility, alongside an examination of the wider significance of finding a narrative for oneself and the parallel possibilities currently being explored in theatre for representation and recruitment. It consequently points forward to the following chapter's discussion of the difficult dynamics around representation and recruitment which remain in play in disability casting and the significance of these issues being framed by a show of such vast scale and popularity.

Continuing this trajectory, which complicates distinct definitions of genre and commerciality and considers a character not usually read as disabled, Chapter Five's focus on *Wicked* (2006-present) does almost the reverse. It enables an exploration of an instance of a non-disabled performer playing a prominent disabled character in a popular and avowedly 'mainstream' musical. This is positioned alongside an interrogation of the wider issues in the industry that led to such casting decisions, and the implications of this portrayal for the interplay between representation and recruitment. It continues consideration of accessibility, once again necessitated by venue, and allies this to queries around responsibility of creative teams. It also provides an example of the ways in which a nominally representative character may not in fact be as positive a presence as they are at first proposed to be. This thereby engages with the paradox of a plethora of representational examples coexisting with marginalisation – and the potentially problematic perpetuation of certain characteristics in a show with such wide reach.

Chapter Six then moves to complicate this narrative by examining the even wider reach of a television programme like *Call the Midwife* (2012-present), and the apparent ethos behind its production. This chapter is the longest of the empirical analyses, due to its discussion of the presence of multiple narratives around disability and its resultant showcasing what seems to be good practice and positive potential. In this latter quality, it consequently parallels the purpose of Chapter Four, although their difference in

media facilitates a comparison here between the two sectors as providers of employment opportunities and representation. This is in acknowledgement of the dual facts that performance work frequently entails movement between the mediums of theatre and television and that each of these have their own problems and possibilities with regards to disability. The show's situation as a medical drama is also considered, examining the ways in which this feature combines with its period setting to comment on its wider sociocultural implications in both the past and the present. It explores how this pairing, as well as the opportunities provided by a mixture of adaptation and new writing, often subverts expectations and conventions of genre and impact, interrogating, pace Kershaw (2013 [1999]), 'the possibility that the past may be drawn on by performance as a source for a resistant critique of the present, or even for a trenchant radicalism' (162).

It therefore connects usefully to Chapter Seven and the thesis' conclusion, which returns to the example of *Emilia* as offered here, since the show works across the canon and new writing to provide opportunities for both representation and recruitment. Just as its parallel existence at Shakespeare's Globe and the Vaudeville theatre in the West End simultaneously seemed to provide emancipation and exclusion, so too it functions as a useful site at which to reflect upon the project of the thesis, and re-engage with the research questions, to gauge the relative progress towards the future proposed by productions such as *Not I* and programmes like *Call the Midwife*. Moreover, as a significant contribution to the current theatrical landscape, it also provides a convenient frame for the discussion of the contributions made by the thesis to the current *scholarly* landscape and to situate suggestions for future work.

Consequently, the combination of each of the analyses with the theories and methods considered in the other chapters, allows for an exploration of the ways in which the interplay of representation and recruitment either facilitates or frustrates the 'working realities' and labour processes of disabled performers. The thesis thereby engages with the socioeconomic expectations held by, and about, disabled practitioners across the UK theatre and television sectors. It queries how far we are perceived as viable and productive artists on our own terms and the representational possibilities which arise from our presences on stage and screen. Moreover, in providing an outline of the position of disability as an employment issue in UK theatre and television, it functions

simultaneously to emphasise the need and desire for change and to articulate the prevailing mood about the current circumstances. This combined focus – on the state of play as it is and the state of play as we might wish it to be – forms the substance of the next chapter’s review of existing literature and practice across the several disciplines, discourses and fields relevant to this thesis’ enquiry into the interplay of representation and recruitment in disability casting.

## Chapter Two

### Contextual Review

To contextualise my research into disability casting and representation as an employment issue, this chapter considers the available literature around this topic and in related fields. The scope of the examination involves linking three areas of enquiry that are not perhaps as disparate as either the popular imagination or more mainstream academic writing would suggest, and which consequently position this study as interdisciplinary. These are the relationship between disability and theatre and television; the relationship between theatre and television and employment; and the relationship between disability and employment. They require analysis across work and employment relations around the topics of disability, theatre and television, especially in Industrial Relations (IR) and Human Resource Management (HRM), with a particular focus on diversity and equal opportunities (EO). The review also references the relatively nascent field of disability studies, and its growth from disability rights activism, to explore the different 'models' of disability and their respective impact on, and relevance to, these other areas of focus. The chapter is split into four sections – models of disability and related theories; disability and employment; theatre, television and employment; and disability and theatre and television. Since the aim of the thesis is to discover and develop points of synergy between them, however, there is a certain amount of 'cross-pollination' and overlap; in line with the interdisciplinary nature of the research.

To begin, in any analysis involving the concept of disability, it is of course important to consider what is meant by the *word* disability. It will also be evident from Chapter One that 'disability' has thus far been used interchangeably with 'impairment', but that I have used the phrase 'non-disabled people' as opposed to 'able-bodied'. These two aspects are addressed in the first section of this review.

#### *Models of disability and related theories*

In writing about what is 'meant' by disability, it is possible to refer to various theoretical models to define it. Some, such as the 'medical' and 'social' models, have already been mentioned in Chapter One. These, and their relationship, are explicated further here, along with three additional models, and other perspectives relevant to analysis of

disability. The first model was actually originally termed as the ‘individual’ model, because ‘it locates the “problem” of disability within the individual’ (Oliver 1990 n.p.). It considers ‘the causes of this problem as stemming from the functional limitations or psychological losses which are assumed to arise from disability’ (Oliver 1990 n.p.). The ‘social’ model, by contrast, situates ‘disability’ as arising from ‘the nature and workings of society’ (Finkelstein 2001 1), which creates disabling barriers. This phrasing was formalised by Michael Oliver (1983, 1990) and others such as Vic Finkelstein (2001) as a scholarly extension of the earlier work by activist organisations, particularly the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). UPIAS was a coalition and pressure group founded (in 1972) from continuing struggles in the disability community for autonomy and independence. The split between ‘disability’ and ‘impairment’ mentioned above thus results from the different perspectives of the social and medical models. This is articulated in the UPIAS ‘Fundamental Principles of Disability’ discussion document:

Our own position on disability is quite clear, and is fully in line with the agreed principles. In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society (1975)

This was an important claim at the time, serving to emphasise disability as a civil rights issue alongside race, gender and sexuality, underscoring that disabled people are an ‘oppressed group in society’. The necessity of the social alternative is still palpable, especially in the context of employment. This thesis (specifically concerned with recruitment and selection practices and labour processes) must make recourse to certain legislation. Chief among this is the Equality Act (2010), which defines disability as follows:

- (1) A person (P) has a disability if—
  - (a) P has a physical or mental impairment, and
  - (b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- (2) A reference to a disabled person is a reference to a person who has a disability. (Equality Act 2010 Part 2 Chapter 1 4).

This illustrates the still pervasive presence of medical model perspectives, and the consequent importance of the social model. As Tom Shakespeare (2014) phrases it, in his retrospective assessment of emergent disability theory, '[p]erhaps only the most powerful counter-claim could have effectively dislodged the deep-seated idea that disabled people are defined by their incapacity' (17). I should note that I refer to Shakespeare's works a great deal here – as I do with IR scholars such as Deborah Foster in later sections – because the relevance of his thinking to an analysis of disability in the context of creative employment is wide-ranging and has significant bearing across the disciplines and topics with which it is necessary to engage.

For, just as the continued reference to the medical model requires examination, it is also vital to interrogate aspects of the social model. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the split between 'disability' and 'impairment', so far used interchangeably, on the basis of two questions posed by Shakespeare:

[H]ow easy is it to distinguish the effects of impairment from the effects of disablement (whether defined as barriers or oppression)? What sense would it make to distinguish these different factors in the complexity of an individual psyche? (2014 24)

These questions are based on earlier work by Shakespeare and Watson (2002), who suggest that:

Rather than trying to break the definitional link between impairment and disability, we should expose the essential connection between impairment and embodiment [...] part of the psychological origins of hostility to disabled people may lie in the tendency of non-disabled people to deny their vulnerability and frailty and mortality, and to project these uncomfortable issues onto disabled people, who they can subsequently oppress and exclude and ignore. (28)

Such foregrounding of embodiment, and the resultant idea of an 'ontology of embodiment' (2002 10), is particularly pertinent in the context of performance work as an essentially embodied profession, considered later in this review. Its more general

relevance to the construction of this thesis is found in the retrospective reminder that '[a]ny adequate account of disability has to include people who have degenerative chronic illnesses such as diabetes or arthritis, as well as people with "classic" impairments' (Shakespeare 2014 81). This is important on two levels. Firstly, it underscores the basis of the social model in the activism of UPIAS, an organisation of which full membership was only granted to those with physical impairments. Secondly, it highlights how this could present a problem for the outright denial of the medical model, when the foundations are necessarily extended to include other impairments. Whilst, as Shakespeare acknowledges, 'if disability is about social arrangements, not physical or mental impairments, then attempts to mitigate or cure medical problems may be regarded with intense suspicion' (2014 18), this assessment does not always apply. In certain contexts, indeed, not only is medical intervention deemed necessary, but mitigation or cure is often actively desired – especially in relation to pain. Moreover, the concept of pain is useful as an example of the elision of impairment and disability. As Shakespeare observes (after Wall [1999]), '[p]ain itself is generated through the interplay of physiological, psychological and socio-cultural factors and thus the individual experience can never be separated from the social context' (2014 22). Pain and its significance to an analysis of disability is elaborated on throughout this thesis, and especially in Chapter Four's examination of Touretteshero's *Not I* alongside Ato Quayson's (2007) theory of 'aesthetic nervousness'. This is evident 'when the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are shortcircuited in relation to disability' (17) – a point revisited below in relation to Dean's (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b) theories around performance work.

The particular relevance of pain here, though, is in connecting Shakespeare's (2014) embodied ontology to a further alternative to the social model – Alison Kafer's (2013) political/relational model. Continuing to acknowledge the importance of society, Kafer states that 'the problem of disability no longer resides in the minds or bodies of individuals but in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being' (2013 5). Further, she suggests that it is 'located in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies [and] not solved through medical interventions or surgical normalization but through social

change and political transformation' (6). However, in outlining the impetus for formulating the political/relational model, she emphasises that it

neither opposes nor valorizes medical intervention; rather than simply taking such intervention for granted, it recognizes instead that medical representations, diagnoses and treatments of bodily variations are imbued with ideological biases about what constitutes normalcy and deviance. In so doing, it recognizes the possibility of simultaneously desiring to be cured of chronic pain and to be identified and allied with disabled people. I want to make room for people to acknowledge – even mourn – a change in form or function whilst also acknowledging that some changes cannot be understood apart from the context in which they occur. (2013 6)

This idea of 'making room' for different kinds of acknowledgement around the reality of life with impairment recurs repeatedly throughout the thesis, both in relation to the practical implications of what Carol Thomas (1999) terms 'impairment effects' such as differing mobility and speech within the environment of performance work, and decisions about disclosure. With reference to the wider scope of this review, it also points to the spectrum of responses to our lived experiences, as well as to the historical and socio-cultural specificities surrounding the advent of the medical and social models.

This links to a further important concept emphasising the necessity of adapting theoretical understandings of disability within the analysis of different historical periods. Chris Mounsey (2014) 'propose[s] a new analysis of the body – Variability – that goes beyond the rhetoric of sameness and difference that concerned scholars in the twentieth century' (1). For Mounsey, '[d]isability is a narrow vein of study which [...] should not be separated off into its constituent parts [...] since each person's disability (under whichever banner it may subtend) is unlike any other person's, while the experience of being disabled is the same for each disabled person' (1). He makes this claim because he is simultaneously 'accorded the same protections under legislation as all other vision impaired [sic] people in Britain' and 'the first with the group of symptoms that [his] physician has recorded', which renders him 'unique, different, exceptional even among people "like me"' (1). He further expands the coexistence of

these potential contradictions, articulating how he ‘share[s] with [his] friend Robert, who is in a wheelchair, the desire to go for a walk by [himself]’. Of Robert, he says,

[o]ur experience of one of the limitations of our disability is the same, although our disabilities are very different. We are the “same only different.” Likewise, Robert and I are the “same only different” from people who do not class themselves as disabled. We all have a body that has its different capacities, we all make decisions about what we believe are the capabilities of that body and we all encounter other bodies with their peculiar capacities and capabilities and learn from them (2014 1).

This latter point at once links back (discursively) and jumps forward (chronologically) to the ideas of embodied ontology foregrounded by Shakespeare (2014), who makes similar statements about the inherent diversity of human experience, positing the ubiquity of impairment across the human condition. However, Shakespeare phrases his thinking with a crucial caveat, reminding readers that

[t]o claim that “everyone is impaired” should not lead to any trivialising of impairment or the experience of disabled people [since] impairments differ in their impact. It is important to appreciate and respect those real differences – particularly in the extent to which people are affected by suffering and restriction. (2014 87)

This thesis closely adheres to this caveat. Nevertheless a wider scope seems not just useful but necessary when working with a subject requiring a multidisciplinary approach, as well as a research area whose primary purpose is to present, and represent, that very same human condition for assessment and analysis through artistic means. As Shakespeare (2014) suggests:

The benefits of regarding every human being as living with the predicament of impairment are that it forces us to pay attention to what we have in common; it counsels us to accept the inextricable limitation of life, rather than to deny or fight against it; it suggests the need to re-evaluate disabled people; it focuses attention on the social aspects of disability. For example, if everyone is impaired, why are certain impairments remedied or accepted, and others not? How can we

minimise the impact of impairment on functioning? Why does impairment result in exclusion in some cases and not others? (88)

These questions are particularly pertinent to a discussion of employment. They seek to interrogate and examine some of the fundamental issues which form the basis of legislation such as the Equality Act (2010) and its disability-specific predecessors, the two Disability Discrimination Acts (hereafter DDA) of 1995 and 2005. The questions also tend towards a sort of synthesis of the medical and social models. They articulate the difficulties of distinguishing between the two when considering what Shakespeare (2014) terms, “‘actually existing disability’, [...] comprehending both the diversity of illness and impairment experiences and contexts, and the breadth of everyday life’ (4). This is a paradox which might be the crux of discussing the nature and nuances of performance work due to its inherent intertwining of embodiment and social commentary. Furthermore, the complexity of such distinctions (or the absence of them) is important to acknowledge alongside the scope, not merely of this thesis, but of the language used by the participants in the research it reports. This is also evident in theoretical thinking. Returning to the distinction between the phrases ‘disability’ and ‘impairment’ discussed above, Shakespeare (2014) states:

the social model mandates the term “disabled people”, because people with impairment are disabled by society, not by their bodies. The phrases “people with disabilities” or worse, “people with physical disabilities” become unacceptable because they imply that “disabilities” are individual deficits. Those who refer to “people with disabilities” are thus adopting the “medical model” and must be re-educated or repudiated. In the UK, many who use the phrase “people with disabilities” do so because they are striving to be respectful and supportive of disability rights and social inclusion. Rather than defining someone in terms of their impairments, they choose “people first” terminology to express the common humanity which disabled people share. In other words, while terminology is important, it is not important as underlying values. “People-first” language is the dominant terminology in the global disability rights field (19)

In cognisance of this diversity of phrasing, whilst I use ‘disabled people’, along with its counterpart phrase of ‘non-disabled people’, this is as much for structural consistency

as it is a political point. I do not seek to undermine the importance of terminology, since the subtitle of my thesis – “Rolling the Boards”, as opposed to ‘treading’ them – was chosen precisely to emphasise the ambulatory-centric nature of the profession it investigates. Rather I wish to incorporate the wide range of language encountered across interviews with participants comfortably and coherently without requiring explanation in each case. It also allows smoother segues between each of my performance and production analyses. In line with Chris Mounsey’s (2014) cautions against potential anachronisms, by acknowledging that the application of an overtly ‘disabled’ identity to certain characters may be inappropriate in the context of their particular period.

Linking these linguistic concerns back to the practical realms of employment, they emphasise how engagement with the dominant discourses is often necessary, whether in order to augment or dismantle them, or simply to survive. This possibility thereby invokes Robert McRuer’s theory of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ (2006). This is an expansion of Adrienne Rich’s concept of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (1980, 1986). There has been considerable engagement with the theory, in a variety of contexts (such as Epstein et al. 2003; Richardson 2003; Tolman et al. 2003; Tolman 2006). However, these do not explore disability. Consequently, in line with McRuer (2006) I restrict my focus to Rich’s original formulation. For Rich, ‘lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible’ through ‘the bias of compulsory heterosexuality’ (2018 [1980, 1986] 195). McRuer (2006) builds on this to propose that ‘the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness’ (1). He observes how ‘being able-bodied means being capable of the normal physical exertions required in a particular system of labor’ (7), and asserts from this that, ‘[l]ike compulsory heterosexuality, then, compulsory able-bodiedness functions by covering over, with the appearance of choice, a system in which there actually is no choice’ (8) for disabled and non-disabled people alike except to capitulate to normative standards. I extend ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ (with its emphasis on labour processes) to encompass Alison Kafer’s (2013) important inclusion of ‘able-mindedness’ (16). The combination of the two provides a powerful example of the manner in which, as Iris Marion Young (1990) suggests, ‘[t]he culturally dominated

undergo a paradoxical oppression, in that they are both marked out by stereotypes and at the same time rendered invisible' (59). This is echoed by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (1997) formulation of the extraordinary body in contrast to the 'normate' (8). They thereby allow an additional framework for the consideration of conventions around disability casting and their interplay with representation. This is of particular use in Chapter Six's analysis of *Call the Midwife* and the pressures its period setting imposes on its characters.

### *Disability and Employment*

The paucity of literature across all three relevant areas regarding disability casting practices and labour processes in theatre and television seems paralleled regarding disability and employment more generally. Within IR and HRM, Foster and Williams (2014) note that '[t]he literature on difference and the professions is well developed, emerging from debates on the professions and status although this difference focuses on gender, race and class and lacks an engagement with disability' (3-4). This assertion is repeated a year later by Foster and Scott (2015) who state that '[a] relatively small body of literature in the UK has focused on the management of ill and disabled employees, and outside of disability studies, an even smaller literature has documented employee experiences of that management' (330). These claims are striking in similarity to Foster and Fosh's (2010) words at the beginning of the current decade, noting two seemingly oppositional trends:

Discussions of workplace diversity have increasingly become integrated into the mainstream industrial relations (IR) literature. They feature in debates on union representation and renewal and in analyses of the influence of social movements, diversity and the 'politics of identity' [...] In the UK, these debates have been dominated by considerations of gender and race. In comparison, the workplace interests of disabled employees have been relatively neglected, contributing to what Humphrey (1998: 588), in her account of disabled people in the UK trade union movement, describes as 'a political and cultural forgetfulness'. (560)

The lack of literature is emphasised, and these scholars quoted at length, for two reasons. Firstly, they raise three important and recurring points, around which discussion in this section is framed: the distinction between mainstream academia and

disability studies; a focus on professions as opposed to other forms of work; and the similarities and differences between the workplace experiences of different minority groups. The latter point in particular is crucial to the discussion of the varying approaches to EO and is returned to repeatedly throughout this review. Secondly, the prevalent mention of lack within what is actually a steadily increasing body of literature is an intriguing juxtaposition. It is certainly important to acknowledge that most of the disability-related work in mainstream IR discourses is recent in comparison to that within disability studies (Foster [2007], Foster and Wass [2012] as well as the previous citations). This seems to corroborate Foster and Fosh's reference to Humphrey observing 'a political and cultural forgetfulness' as early as 1998. It is also interesting that the majority of literature refers to work done by a small group of scholars (hence the frequent citations of Foster). This is comparable to the two other relevant fields. However, the claim that the area of research has been 'relatively neglected' in mainstream IR scholarship is not entirely accurate. As an example, when writing about the possibility of constructive compromise within EO, Sonia Liff (1999) actively includes disability within her analysis of initiatives supporting and promoting minority groups. Similarly, Woodhams and Danieli (2000) raise the concern that disability might already be considered 'a difference too far', writing only five years after the passing of the first Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in 1995. Moreover, in a manner prescient of Shakespeare's much later work (2002, 2006, 2014) discussed above, Woodhams and Danieli (2000) explicitly base their reasoning in questions about how the heterogeneity of the disability experience may hinder the application of EO approaches of any kind – even those using a supposedly more individualised approach to difference, such as Kandola and Fullerton's (1998) concept of Managing Diversity (MD). MD accepts, and then harnesses, the fact that workforces are diverse populations to create a positive and productive organisational environment.

That said, it is true that more 'mainstream' fields (not just those associated with employment, but across the academic spectrum) have been rather slow on the uptake of disability as an area of enquiry – and an effort to remedy this in 'mainstream' theatre studies is one of the basic impetuses of this thesis. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Three, the interdisciplinary nature of the topic necessitates a consideration of my own scholarly position, since it places me as an interstitial being, occupying a suitably

performative liminal space which is both inside and outside of a disability framework. The reasons behind this lack of academic engagement are therefore pertinent. These principally relate to the status of disability as a social justice concern relative to other minority groups; something emphasised by the dates of the legislation already discussed. For the UK disability rights movement has a comparable point of origin to other minority civil rights efforts, as is discernible in the similar dating of the founding statement of UPIAS, discussed above, in 1974, the Race Relations Act (passed in 1976) and the Sex Discrimination Act (passed in 1975). Yet, as Dickens (2007) notes in her survey of EO legislation prior to the Equality Act, '[i]t was to be 20 years on, however, before the enactment of a Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in 1995'. She rightly terms it a 'limited piece of legislation' although does suggest it 'was significantly improved by amendments in 2004 and the DDA 2005' (464). Even more significantly, she uses the DDA as an example of how '[p]rotests and demands from disadvantaged groups have played an important role, with campaigns over many years [...] putting pressure on politicians to act.' She notes that it was 'introduced in 1995 in an attempt to prevent adoption of a more far-reaching Private Member's Bill, such bills having been introduced each year since 1982 as part of a broader campaign' (2007 465). An interesting omission in this lineage of disability legislation is the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944, which required any employer with twenty or more employees to reserve three percent of jobs for disabled people (cf. Thornton and Lunt 1995 4). Such an introduction of quotas, and their removal from later legislation, is of interest in the wider context of employment but has a particular pertinence in current public and political conversations around theatre and television. This is in part due to Sir Lenny Henry's recent (2018) petition calling for the opposite: the instigation of tax breaks for companies who employ diversely and inclusively. It was also the subject of his subsequent address to the House of Lords (cf. Parliamentary Media Notice 7th June 2019). Such varying strategies, and shifts in focus towards incentivising, were also raised by many of my interviewees.

Returning to the DDA, in line with the earlier examination of the different disability models, as the legislation promotes the validity of disability as a minority group experience, it could be held as social model-focused. However, as is illustrated by Dickens (2007) above, the DDA passed as a compromise to prevent another bill – so did

no go as far as it might have done. Indeed, it is evident from both the early disability studies literature and the later IR discourses that many activists argued against accepting it, in part because it specifically used a medical definition of disability despite years of advocacy for the social model. Humphrey (1998) records that 'the campaigns around civil rights legislation [...] entered a new phase in the aftermath of the 1996 [sic] Disability Discrimination Act.' She notes the jokes belying the significant feelings of betrayal within the activist community, observing that '[i]t is widely nicknamed the Don't Do Anything and Dump the Disabled Act on account of its medicalisation of disability, justification of discrimination and evasion of enforcement' (595). Writing later and therefore possibly with the benefit of a more distant engagement, Foster and Fosh (2010) note that, 'when antidiscrimination legislation in the form of the UK DDA 1995 eventually found its way onto the statute books, its provisions [...] were shaped not by the social model of disability but by the discredited medical model' (562).

Foster and Wass (2012) take such discrepancies further, considering their implications within the workplace, and note an inherent contradiction which arises from the concept of 'reasonable adjustments': '[t]he law relies on a medical model of disability, yet medical opinion is marginalised in organisational decision-making. Disability legislation allows employers to justify a decision to refuse an adjustment on operational grounds, or on the basis of proportionate cost' (717). These parallel activist and academic concerns are particularly pertinent when considered contemporaneously to the upcoming twenty-fifth anniversary, as is detailed by Shinkwin and Relph's (2019) report on the career progression opportunities for disabled graduates, containing contributions from prominent professionals and organisations across multiple industries (including television, although not performance work). They also have wider significance when examined in juxtaposition to the more general narratives surrounding the contribution of disability (and especially disability legislation) to the realm of EO.

Dean and Liff, writing an overview of diversity and EO issues for Colling and Terry (2010), specifically state that, '[i]n the Disability Discrimination Acts (DDA) 1995 and 2005, conceptions of disability in employment have moved from a predominantly 'medical model' (where the emphasis is on limitations imposed on the individual by their impairment) to a broader 'social model' (where the emphasis is on identifying

external barriers to participation)’ (11). Furthermore they suggest that, in comparison to the race and gender legislation, the disability-focused legal frameworks ‘institutionally recognise that discrimination varies in how and why it is experienced by individuals who are nominally part of the same category’ (11). This is important, recalling Woodhams and Danieli’s (2000) assertion of disability’s heterogeneity, and highlights the additional focus of the Disability Equality Duty (DED)’s requirement that ‘account be taken of impairments, even where that involves treating disabled persons *more favourably than* other persons’ (Dean and Liff 2010 11). Such a shift is a fundamental one, as it alters the premise on which equality is based, and, indeed, suggests an approach to difference which is actually founded on ‘equity’ (cf. Liff [1999]).

This could also be significant in relation to issues of gender and race (and sexual orientation) – the ‘cross-pollination’ to which I referred at the beginning of this review. Indeed, this was the hopeful impetus behind the creation of the single Equality Act in 2010 (cf. Dickens [2007]). For Dean and Liff (2010), however, ‘what is interesting about this provision is that it is conceptually ring-fenced: it has not been allowed to leak into consideration of the other equality categories and, so far, has not been taken up as an argument by trade unions or other interested parties’ (11). Moreover, given the aforementioned concerns regarding the DDA (and the retention of a similarly medical definition of disability in the Equality Act), it seems reasonable to question the significance of its impact even within the ‘conceptually ring-fenced’ realm of disability.

My assessment of this legislation is, like that of Foster and Wass (2012) and others, mediated by a sense of hopes unfulfilled – especially now it is not only the end of the decade since the Equality Act but the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first DDA is due to be marked (cf. Shinkwin and Relph 2019). Nevertheless, I do not negate their collective significance. For Foster and Wass (2012), ‘[t]he importance of the DDA [...] is that it directly challenged the match between an employee and a given job specification’ (706). This is in line with its emphasis on heterogeneity. Qualifying their statement, however, they suggest that the success of the DDA was

predicated [...] on the assumption that employers would recognise the ableist values attached to the notion of an ideal worker around which jobs and

production systems had been traditionally designed, and understand the need for, and agree to, functional, task, person and organisational flexibility' (706).

Although the structure of the creative industries is in many ways radically different from other professions (a fact elaborated in the next section), this predication seems particularly pertinent with regards to performance and disability. Whilst a discussion of the concept of the 'ideal worker' in theatre and television is more appropriate to their sectors' specified sections of this review, Foster and Wass' (2012) comment chimes with the basic premise of Carrie Sandahl's (2005) essay on disability and actor training, 'The Tyranny of Neutral'. She argues that the *tabula rasa* expected of drama school students is inherently prejudiced against disabled individuals. This notion is investigated in post-training contexts by Dean (2007) and explored in the next two sections of this review.

The concept of the ideal worker who is easily malleable into any job is explicitly linked to the DDA by Foster and Wass (2012) through cost. It, and the succeeding Equality Act, allow for refusal of 'reasonable adjustments' on the basis of significant financial expenditure. This is in turn an example of one of the approaches to EO, widely termed the 'business case' for diversity. Simply, this involves, in Dickens' (1999) phrasing, 'getting employers to see that equality is in the interests of the business' (9). However, as Dickens herself illustrates through advocating alternative approaches 'beyond the business case' (1999 *passim.*), its application in the reality of workplace situations is far from simple. Indeed she suggests the opposite, positing that it provides 'an insecure foundation for general overall improvement in the position of women and ethnic minorities' (9), because

by definition, such arguments encourage action only in areas where it is clear that EO and business needs coincide. Although they may at times concur, there is no guarantee of a matching between the needs of disadvantaged groups and the particular business case equality interests of individual employers (10)

Dickens' choice of the words 'guarantee' and 'matching' is reminiscent of Foster and Wass' (2012) articulation of the supposed purpose of the DDA and Equality Act. It thereby offers an explicit linguistic connection to the group who are arguably most disadvantaged by such formulations of business strategy. To Dickens' (1999) list of

those affected by such ‘an insecure foundation’ I would add disabled employees, whose precarity in the job market is discussed below, and who are particularly vulnerable to the ‘inevitably contingent, variable, selective and partial’ nature of arguments constructed around a business case (9).

Indeed Dickens herself points to the significance of language, albeit not referencing disability, when she states the fundamental flaw of such approaches: ‘[o]nce the debate is conducted in the language of what is in the interests of the business, then a business case can be articulated against EO action’ (10). Within the particular equality framework surrounding disability (with its focus on heterogeneity) it is fairly easy to perceive the lines along which such a case against provision might be (and frequently is) pursued – namely one of cost (cf. Papworth Trust 2018; Randle and Hardy 2017). In mandating for ‘reasonable adjustments’ whilst also (rightly) emphasising the variety of impairments and ‘impairment effects’ (Thomas 1999), the legislation implicitly acknowledges that the provision for one employee with a disability may not help another – and may in fact hinder. Consequently, the business case argument is most difficult to apply in relation to disability.

This is significant against the backdrop of recent and current Arts cuts – and responses to them. The most prominent example is probably the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value (2015), which espouses the criticality of what it terms ‘our country’s Cultural and Creative Industries’, and is replete with policy recommendations. This highly-publicised document has examples of the business case ideology throughout. The Commission articulates its purpose as being to promote a ‘united and coherent approach that guarantees equal access for everyone to a rich cultural education and the opportunity to live a creative life’. It also emphasises the understanding of the commissioners (and Chair, Vikki Heywood) that ‘[t]here are barriers and inequalities in Britain today that prevent this from being a universal human right’. However, in summarising the impact of this in her foreword, Heywood states that ‘[t]his is bad for business and bad for society’ (2015 Heywood Foreword 8). So, whilst the negative impact on society is at least acknowledged, it is secondary to the concern of business. Furthermore, although there are calls to close the gap between the rhetoric of legislation and the reality (cf. Cunningham et al. 2004), especially in relation to workforce, executive and audience diversity, even this is couched in the language of

business. There is an acknowledgement that ‘work needs to be done across the Cultural and Creative Industries Ecosystem to achieve this goal. We cannot fully enrich Britain unless we do’. Yet ‘decisive progress’ is still framed as ‘both a social and *economic imperative*’ (2015 Ch. 3, Goal 2, 14, my emphasis).

The Warwick Commission is distinctive among recent cultural policy documents for the space afforded to disability alongside other minority groups, not least in its repeated referencing of the cuts to Access to Work and other disability-specific initiatives. However, its adherence to the business case framework even in these sections sends contradictory messages:

It is a mistake to think that the under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals, women, deaf [sic]<sup>1</sup> and disabled people and low-income groups in the Cultural and Creative Industries is purely a social justice issue. It is also very bad for business, diminishing the breadth and depth of creative perspectives, audiences and consumers. A lack of diversity and under-representation also damages our international reputation and trust in the UK as a diverse and tolerant society. (2015 Ch.2, 21)

The status of the Warwick Commission as a cultural policy document, and its reliance on socio-political legislation as a response to diversity, would suggest that it adheres to the definition of disability provided in such legislation. This is predominantly based on a medical model of disability. The implications of such a definition in relation to creative employment practices are not insignificant, because of the prominence of unionisation within the sector. Foster and Fosh (2010) suggest that the medical model, by definition sits in conflict ‘with traditional collective approaches favoured by trade unions, which has implications for disabled employees and union representation’ (560). Consequently, the remainder of this section explores literature surrounding the experience of disabled people regarding union representation, and the potential implications of this for theatre and television.

The primary issues here are again workplace adjustments – where union representation and disability might be supposed to meet most straightforwardly – but also the

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<sup>1</sup> The [sic] here is in reference to the lack of capitalisation of ‘deaf’, which denotes a more general focus on individuals with hearing impairments rather than adherence to the politicised identity of ‘Deaf culture’.

reminder that employees have to be in the workplace before it can be adjusted. Both of these have an impact on the nature of the role of specific unions and what employees might ask, or indeed expect, of their representatives. This is particularly pertinent in relation to Equity, the UK's independent union for performers and other creative practitioners since its foundation in 1929. Equity seeks 'to improve the working lives of members and represent their interests' (cf. Equity.org.uk). Like all unions, it is no longer a closed shop, and its powers have been significantly reduced since the reforms of the Thatcher administration (cf. Dean 2012). For whilst Equity has a number of self-organised groups (SOGs [cf. Humphrey 1998]), including for D/deaf and disabled members, there are several factors which might dissuade many potential members from joining the union at all – the most pertinent of which here are the membership charge and the possibility of calling oneself a 'performer' without paying that charge. This is true for people from all social groups, as is illustrated by data from the EuroFIA report (one of the few available datasets in the field) which shows that '[m]ost performers earn very little from their work (and 5% of both genders [sic] earned nothing from performing in 2006-7)' (Dean 2008b 5, Executive Summary point 7), and of which organisation the 'largest individual union [...] is Equity in the UK (36,000 members [now 45,000 as of 2019])' (Dean 2008b 10). However, the purpose of the report was to record participants' employment experiences around the intersection of gender and age. This led to qualifications in the more generally-applicable findings, such as the fact that 'there is a greater proportion of women in the lowest income group and a smaller proportion in the highest income group' (5, Executive Summary point 7). I would suggest that the data on disability and impairment (collected but not included for analysis [Dean 2008b 11, 14] would provide similar information. Therefore the membership charges may be especially prohibitive for disabled members (or potential members) who often go at least a year between auditions, even after relative success.

Such a combination of factors both corroborates and complicates Foster and Fosh's (2010) observation that '[w]orkplace adjustments are typically a *prerequisite* for a disabled person *not* to experience disadvantage, suggesting representation must be *proactive* if discrimination is to be avoided' (564). Following earlier discussion of the difficulties posed by the 'business case' ideology for disability, it is true that proactive representation is fundamental – but that representation needs to be available in the

first place, in the form of available and accessible recruitment processes as well as jobs. Indeed, this is addressed by Foster and Fosh (2010) with the acknowledgement that many disabled people 'continue to be excluded from the labour market'. They therefore suggest that the problem rests in the way that

[u]nion involvement in disability issues in the workplace tends to concentrate on one dimension of discrimination that the DDA sought to address — job retention (including workplace adjustments). Developing a role beyond the workplace would, however, address the other, relatively neglected purpose of the DDA, to tackle discrimination against disabled people at the point of recruitment among those who may not yet be union members (566).

This wider-reaching approach is both applicable and helpful within the context of theatre and television performance work – particularly as one of the most commonly-cited issues is a supposed lack of 'suitably-trained' available performers.

It is therefore concerning to note that, in studies related to union representation and disability more generally, 'a significant proportion of interviewees who belonged to a union preferred to approach a government or voluntary organization rather than their union, for advice and support on workplace disability issues' (Foster and Fosh 2010 568). Even more worryingly, though, are the reasons behind this preference. For many of the interviewees in Foster and Fosh's (2010) study of several different union-supported professions, it seems that 'the very act of requesting workplace disability adjustments was itself interpreted by employers as confrontational' (569). Moreover, in examining this, the authors (and their subsequent readers) are again themselves confronted with the 'business case' ideology and its ramifications. One of the recurring issues reported was a fear that 'employers will view [the interviewed employees] as an additional cost'. Foster and Fosh (2010) observe that this fear persists 'despite the UK government's "Access to Work" programme, which meets 100 per cent of the costs of equipment required by a disabled person in post for less than six weeks and will pay the full costs if over £10,000, or a proportion (80 per cent) of costs over £300, for those in post over six weeks' (573). In the current climate, of course, this is much less of a caveat, since cuts to Access to Work have been one of the most highly-publicised (and criticised) elements of the government's 'welfare reforms' (cf. Baumberg 2014; Barnes

and Mercer 2016; Shinkwin and Relph 2019). '[T]here is often a lack of understanding among employers about the scheme and of the support provided, so there is a need for more education about how this scheme works' (Helen Dolphin, qtd. in Shinkwin and Relph 2019 11). Yet, for those who navigate it and rely on it, the changes might serve as further justification for such fears, particularly alongside Danieli and Wheeler's (2006) wider suggestion that governmental and public attitudes and policy towards disability are perhaps not as specific or temporally contingent as they may at first seem. This is interesting in relation to the aforementioned reluctance to seek union support regarding disability issues (observed by Foster and Fosh [2010] and Foster and Scott [2015], as well as Bacon and Hoque [2015] in their analysis of the small-scale TUC initiative providing 'disability champions' in liaison roles). For, although these two factors might at first seem to be counterposed, I would posit that they are actually fundamentally linked. They seem to suggest that even disabled employees do not properly consider the difficulties they encounter to be justifiable as an employment issue – the possible reasons for which are discussed below. If this is the case, it offers another example of how disability serves as a prominent marker of more general issues of difference. Whilst doubts around its validity in employment may stem from the prevalence of the medical model, it is likely to have been compounded by notions similar to that of the 'ideal worker' explored by Foster and Wass (2012), which would extend to unions.

Humphrey addresses this possibility in her disability studies-framed articles on self-organisation and the politics of difference within union groups. She points to a

repression of identity politics in general, which derives from the traditional trade union consciousness as a *class* consciousness. Here we uncover the presumption of a *unified* trade union subject, the proletarian counterpart to the universal bourgeois citizen, both of whom can be unmasked as straight, white, non-disabled men (cf. Young, 1989). Whilst stratification along the dimensions of occupation and income will be acknowledged, stratification along the dimensions of gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality tends to be locked away in a 'personal' sphere, closeted and forgotten. (1998 588)

Her acknowledgement of this generality is, however, used as a tool to highlight the ways in which hegemony (both of Trade Union organisation and society more generally) has a particularly adverse effect in relation to disability: '[i]t is in everyday life that disabled people remain second-class citizens wherever they go – or cannot go' (1998 594).

Foster and Scott (2015) reference the prevalence of early retirement or redundancy on medical grounds mentioned by Humphrey (1998), noting that many of the interviewees in their precarity-specific study suggested that employers 'used this practice as a means to reduce staff numbers' (334). Recalling the findings of Foster and Fosh (2010) and Foster and Wass (2012), they state that interviewees 'either rated the local representatives poorly or believed the union would not consider their circumstances sufficiently major' (Foster and Scott 338). This uncertainty was once again coupled with the perception of 'an unwillingness to relinquish traditional conceptions and practices of overall job allocation in the face of the particular needs of disabled employees' (338).

Further, recalling Wilson-Kovacs et al.'s (2008) observation of the relative over and under-representation of disabled people in lower paid service jobs versus better paid managerial and professional positions cited in Chapter One alongside the wage gap figures from The Papworth Trust (2018), this situation is despite their parallel reporting of the fact that academic and professional success is often equivalent to non-disabled people. I will question this academic attainment parallel in the next section regarding work in theatre and television (and particularly performance). It does not nominally require any form of qualification but there is a current predominance of vocational degrees from drama schools. Here, though, it is therefore important to reiterate the distinction it carries as a profession rather than another kind of occupation. As Foster and Williams (2014) note, there is a great deal of 'symbolism' (4) surrounding such work as a result – preconceptions about everything ranging from job structure expectations to what constitutes the aforementioned 'ideal worker'.

Linking such symbolism to disability precarity through the notion of the 'glass cliff', developed by their co-authors Ryan and Haslam (2005) and reminiscent of Dickens' (1999) 'sticky floor' (10), Wilson-Kovacs et al. (2008) state that '[e]mployers often make assumptions about low productivity and the quality of output of such workers. Relative to other employees, employers are more likely to question the work ethic of disabled

workers and their aspirations for career advancement while believing they are more prone to absenteeism, less committed to their work and less capable of getting along with others on the job' (706). Further to this, there is yet more discussion of factors relating to cost and therefore implicating the 'business case' ideology. These elements refer back to 'reasonable adjustments' but also add an additional layer of concerns that go beyond even Humphrey's (1998) articulation of the vulnerability to redundancy and retirement. Wilson-Kovacs et al. (2008) highlight three areas of difficulty:

(a) the perceived costs involved in providing a working environment that caters to their specific needs and requirements; (b) the assumption that there is a greater possibility of disabled employees hurting themselves (leading to insurance claims); (c) the belief that related discipline and dismissal procedures are especially problematical. Together, these assumptions lead employers to believe that there is a greater risk in hiring and promoting disabled rather than non-disabled workers. (706)

These employer concerns are particularly striking alongside the findings of Baumberg (2014). He posits a direct link between greater employer flexibility (leading to greater employee control) and fewer issues around incapacity claims, now framed as Employment and Support Allowance. He also acknowledges that jobs with these attributes have become increasingly difficult to find in the current climate. To return to the 'symbolism' of Foster and Williams (2014), they suggest that 'the nature of professional work often means employees enjoy greater job autonomy, flexibility, control over their work and access to, or influence over, organisational decision-making' (1). This seems to imply an environment especially conducive to disabled employees. Nevertheless, in yet another example of Cunningham et al.'s (2004) 'gap between rhetoric and reality', the practice is perhaps the opposite: '[p]rofessional jobs and in a wider sense successful "careers" are however, often characterised by limitless commitment. The "ideal" professional worker is expected to put work first, and be available to work long hours' (Foster and Williams 2014 1).

The manner in which these aspects may 'be double-edged swords to women and disabled employees' (Foster and Williams 2014 2) is particularly relevant to performance work, a profession almost synonymous with the kind of 'limitless

commitment' mentioned above. This is not only evident in the characterisation of performance as a 'vocation' but in the fact that, especially during rehearsal processes, the expected hours are longer than any usual working day and often liable to be altered or extended at short notice (cf. Dean and Greene 2017). Such 'spontaneity' is potentially highly problematic for disabled performers. It complicates the ability to manage what Foster and Williams (2014), and Williams and Mavin (2012), term 'impairment effects', after Carol Thomas (1999). These refer to the consideration and planning required around 'bodily and cognitive variations' and the option of either 'requiring working arrangements which reflect this or alternatively of negating impairment effects in how they negotiate work arrangements' (Foster and Williams 2014 8-9). As discussed earlier, such ideas of 'negotiation' and 'negation' serve to complicate the split between the social and individual models of disability. They also seem crucial within the context of performance as a profession, especially in relation to physical (and visible) impairment. Such heightened awareness of our physical and cognitive presence in society, and the methods used to manage it, might be figured as explicitly performative. Indeed, this chimes with Bree Hadley's (2014) assertion, discussed in Chapter One, of the ubiquitous 'unconscious performance' required from disabled people as our 'idiosyncrasies are [...] on show' (1). Moreover, Hadley's invocation of performance relies both on the theatrical sense of the word and Judith Butler's concept of performativity, which articulates the way in which human social constructs are both ratified by, and contingent on, their quotidian performance (cf. Butler 2004, 2010, 2011). This sociological perspective connects to Goffman's (1959 [1956]) use of theatre as an analogy for everyday interaction. However, neither Butler nor Goffman make productive reference to disability.

Dean (2005) makes a similar suggestion to Hadley when she notes the 'centrality of looking to performing employment' (769). This again has particular implications for performers with physical impairments, since it is not always feasible to manage how we look. Foster and Williams (2014) observe this conundrum in relation to Haynes' concept of 'physical capital' (2008, 2012). This is the way in which 'the physical body is an important facet of professionalism because it is symbolic of aspects of identity and the self, an embodied representation of a perceived identity' (2012 490) and can therefore be either an economic advantage or disadvantage, a help or hindrance in the

progression of a career. Foster and Williams (2014) foreground this, stating, '[l]ooking professional is therefore closely associated with "being" professional' (9). Moreover, when confronted with such negotiations, and in what is also perhaps a negation and avoidance strategy, they suggest that '[s]elf-employment offers a potential refuge to both female and disabled professionals in some occupations, allowing for potentially unlimited job redesign and leadership experience that is often denied elsewhere (12-13).

Arguably, such '[c]overing or self-accommodating strategies [...] allow the disabled person to feel they remain in control' (10). However, Foster and Williams (2014) also emphasise that '[t]he risks associated with self-employment are nonetheless high, and this route must be seen as the ultimate form of self-accommodation' (13). Consequently, although it does nominally eliminate certain forms of precarity, it could still create others. In this manner, the experience of employment precarity of disabled professionals in most industries, and the strategies used to combat it, are similar to those exhibited in the lives of professional performers, regardless of disability (cf. Dean 2012). With this commonality in mind, along with Foster and Williams' (2014) intention of examining the connections between gender and disability, the next section of this review focuses on current available literature on theatre, television and employment and its potential relevance to my project.

### *Theatre, Television and Employment*

This is yet another area in which there is a relative paucity of literature in both academic and policy terms, although as with the previous section, the available corpus is steadily increasing. This largely results from anthology publications like *Creative Labour: Working in the Creative Industries* (McKinlay and Smith eds. 2009) and the more recent (and theatre studies rather than IR-based) *Intercultural Acting and Performer Training* (Zarrilli, Sasitharan and Kapur eds. 2019). However, that increase is noted here with three caveats. Firstly, that much of the IR-based critical attention has been centred on television but not theatre, or theatre but not television. Secondly, that, where both are considered, it is usually without addressing the differences (or indeed similarities and comparisons) between the forms, and treating them as a homogeneous entity under the umbrella of the 'creative industries' (cf. Eikhof and Warhurst 2013). Thirdly, even

with this increase in scholarship, there is still comparatively little consideration of the specificities of *performance* as work, and the potential links between recruitment and representation which might be made obvious through such consideration – especially in a multidisciplinary analysis across IR and theatre studies. This apparent absence is perhaps in part because of instances '[w]here the work frequently seems to have been confused with the worker, resulting today in an often patronising attitude towards the professional actor (the 'luvvie')' (Dean 2008a 165-166). Consequently, whilst I do make reference to other scholars such as Haunschild and Eikhof (in McKinlay and Smith eds. 2009), this section predominantly draws on the work of Dean. Moreover, her work is extremely pertinent to the topics discussed towards the end of the previous section. In an article exploring the 'aesthetic labour' of performers (an echo of Haynes' formulation of 'physical capital'), Dean (2005) notes:

The employer supervision aspect, prominent in discussion of both aesthetic and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) does not operate in the same continuous fashion, or indeed for the same reasons. Actors generally do not interact with the public when working in subsidized repertory theatre or television; both parties are conspiring in an expectation of pretence, rather than in an expectation of a strange form of genuine feelings-to-order, as with interactive service work. Furthermore, as most performers are self-employed businesses, the supervision of appearance and mobilization and transformation of embodied attributes into competencies and thus use-value for the employer seems largely to be undertaken by performers as individuals. (765)

There are several interesting points raised here, which arguably signal both connection with, and divergence from, the literature on disability and employment. The first is the nature of 'employer supervision' which is closely allied to the fact that 'most performers are self-employed businesses' (cf. also Haunschild and Eikhof 2009). Consequently, the 'transformation of embodied attributes into competencies and thus use-value for the employer seems largely to be undertaken by performers as individuals' (Dean 2005 765). This has potentially significant implications for disabled performers. Whilst the self-employment aspect carries the positive correlations drawn by Foster and Williams (2014), its parallel undertones of precarity are rendered particularly stark by the suggestion that the principal feature of self-employed acting work is the 'transformation

of embodied attributes into competencies and thus use-value' (Dean 2005 765). The relationship inferred between 'embodied attributes' (i.e. physicality and body image) and competencies (with this word's implicit evocation of both capability and intelligence), and the idea that these are then combined to determine and denote use-value is particularly problematic. Especially in cases where the sufficiently successful negation of aforementioned 'impairment effects' is not feasible, when these structures are analysed against Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (1997) notion of the 'extraordinary body' of individuals with physical impairments and our consequent status as hyper-visible, it causes an immediate rupture of the 'conspiring in an expectation of pretence' foregrounded by Dean (2005 765).

However, this recalls Graver's (1997) application of the disjunction created by the actor's working body or 'body of flesh' (230-231), to all actors regardless of disability. It may therefore be plausible to argue, along with Hadley (2014), that physical impairment's requirement of such bodily policing, negotiation and negation at all times (not just within the specific context of theatrical or television-centred employment) in fact serves to give performers with physical impairments an advantage alongside the particularities of the field's precarity. This claim correlates with Black and Pretes' (2007) decision, when conducting a survey of the representation of disability in films (discussed in more detail below) to focus solely on physical disabilities. This choice was based on their observation that 'physical disabilities are visible disabilities and are less subject to scrutiny regarding whether one actually has a disability. Physical disabilities are in the public eye; thus, we can examine public reaction based on the disability and not some hidden or unknown characteristic of the person/character' (2007 68).

It is arguably plausible to extend this suggestion of advantage further within the specific context of performance work, due to an additional layer of complexity in the employment dynamic – the reliance of self-employed performers on agents. The somewhat contradictory nature of this professional relationship, perhaps a further example of Cunningham et al.'s (2004) 'gap between rhetoric and reality', is explored by Dean:

Agents nominally work for their performer client, however, as the International Labour Organization (1992) has noted, 'Although in theory engaged or employed

by the performers, their role in practice, if not in law, was almost that of an employer, in terms of the power and influence that they exercised' (1992: 14). Agents are retained by performers to seek out appropriate work opportunities (auditions) for roles in the performer's perceived status and age/appearance grouping and to negotiate payment and conditions if the performer is offered the job. So they are key gatekeepers to access work and contacts. (2005 766-767)

Such a dynamic may seem to be peculiar to this profession. Yet there is a striking parallel to the working relationship that many disabled people (including myself) have with Personal Assistants we employ (cf. Barnes 1993; Shakespeare 2014; Shakespeare et al. 2017). Although we nominally recruit and employ PAs, the position they occupy is one of authority inasmuch as they literally enable us to live our lives. Indeed, in an interesting linguistic quirk, many of these employees are recruited via agencies, despite actually bearing more relation to agents than to performers in the function they fulfil. Consequently, this prior and extensive experience of negotiating complex power relationships may offer disabled performers yet another gain when navigating the precarity of the industry because the dynamic with an agent is just one more of the many that we ordinarily juggle – although some may counter that it could be one dynamic too many.

All of that said, there are other significant contributory factors to the employment precarity of disabled performers which I would posit do *not* transfer to their non-disabled counterparts. These factors go beyond those previously discussed in relation to disability and employment more generally. They relate to ideas about competition for roles within theatre and television. Although women have been permitted on the professional stage in Britain only since the Restoration (cf. Nussbaum 2010), with the temporal distance of the intervening centuries, Dean's (2005) exploration of the gendered dynamics of casting illustrates that '[w]omen performers are largely not considered to be in competition with men for work; not by employers and gatekeepers and not by themselves' (763). Given the widespread nature of the convention of non-disabled casting in disabled roles, which I am terming 'cripping up' after Kaite O'Reilly (qtd. in Komporály 2005), but is also occasionally called 'disability drag' after Tobin Siebers [2004]), I would posit that Dean's (2005) statement cannot be transferred to disabled performers. It would seem the exact opposite is true, and we are still in direct

competition with our non-disabled counterparts – even, according to the anecdotes of my participants, at the non-professional level of university drama. However, as is shown in the empirical data, the concept of competition was a contested one throughout interviews.

Nevertheless, it does allow for the observation of an intriguing juxtaposition. The idea of ‘type’, which is based on the extent to which individual performers conform to or diverge from particular social stereotypes relating to their characters, suggests to Dean (2008a) that ‘casting directors are looking for people who suggest or embody aspects of the fictional character rather than actors with skills of transformation or invention’ (172). I would argue that, if this is so, such preferences for embodiment rather than transformation directly oppose the prevalence of non-disabled casting. They thereby provide a basis on which to construct my examination of the nuances behind wider disability casting conventions, and the connection and interplay between recruitment and representation it would be pertinent to forge. This is possible by way of a quotation from Randle and Hardy (2017). Addressing disability and impairment in the context of employment in *production* areas of UK film and television and considering the scope of wider analysis, they suggest:

To fully understand the absence of individuals with particular characteristics would certainly involve taking account of the mechanisms by which those aspiring to join the workforce are selected and the workplace dynamics which influence retention and promotion. However, it would also require an exploration of the wider forces which shape aspiration. These might include: family, educational, peer and media influences; the existence, or otherwise, of role models; and the overarching culture which shapes understandings of who might be the appropriate occupants of specific job roles (450)

Conducting just such a study was my aim in situating my research as a point of synergy between theatre studies, disability studies and IR. Consequently, in the concluding section of this review, I address precisely this area of convergence by considering the sparse scholarship on the catalyst of representation and recruitment – the conventions surrounding disability casting.

*Disability, theatre and television (and employment)*

As explored in Chapter One, perhaps the most prominent of ‘mainstream’ casting practices in relation to impairment is the casting of non-disabled performers in disabled roles. Indeed, this has been observed and commented upon enough to have earned its own shorthand colloquialism within disability activism and arts circles. It is most frequently termed ‘cripping up’, after the playwright Kaite O’Reilly (qtd. in Komporály 2005). It has also entered into the popular consciousness, by being the subject of much discussion in the press (thanks to journalists such as Lyn Gardner [2013, 2016] and Frances Ryan [2015] and the increasing ‘mainstream’ prominence of performers such as Liz Carr and Storme Toolis), through programmes such as BBC Four’s *Redefining Juliet* (2016) and BBC Radio Four’s *Acting Disabled* (2016), and the self-published memoir and advice manual by veteran actor David Proud, *The Art of Disability* (2016). However, most of these examples actually focus on disability representation in more general terms, and (crucially for my project) there is very little extant academic discussion specific to casting conventions of any kind, or their implications for performance and employment. That said, although there is little literature on the subject, there are many companies and individuals working practically on these issues. So, as outlined in Chapter One, this review is framed more broadly as a Contextual Review, in order to give space to these examples – since, as Kershaw (2013 [1999]) notes in defining ‘radical’ theatre, ‘possibly most of those practices have been pursued in self-created circumstances, in fresh types of venue, beyond existing theatres’ (62).

Such companies include, in England, long-serving D/deaf and disabled-led organisations like Graeae, Deafinitely, Extant, Mind the Gap, and Access All Areas – by and for D/deaf and disabled practitioners, D/deaf practitioners, visually-impaired practitioners, and learning disabled performers, respectively – and participatory arts companies like Spare Tyre. In Scotland, Birds of Paradise (or BOP) has broadly the same remit as Graeae. In Wales there are Hijinx (for learning disabled practitioners) and Taking Flight (an integrated company of D/deaf, disabled and non-disabled performers). Taking Flight tour productions and much of their work is for younger audiences. This positions them as comparable to the England-based Oily Cart. Fuller details of these companies can be found on their websites in the thesis Bibliography. Moreover, as discussed below, Kirsty Johnston (2016) gives a global sense of the growth of the disability arts

movement. However, the nature of my particular project situates it specifically within the UK context. Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter One, the focus is not on the work of individual companies, which is often devised by their members. Nor does it attend to the ‘self-created’ (Kershaw 2013 [1999] 62) work of significant solo artists such as Martin O’Brien. Rather its interest is more general recruitment and labour processes (requiring interaction with other professionals and organisations) and how these impact on, and are impacted by, representational opportunities. With this in mind, it is important also to refer briefly to the Unlimited commissioning programme (set up by Arts Council England in 2012, as part of the Cultural Olympiad, to fund projects by D/deaf and disabled individual practitioners or small groups) and the more recent Ramps on the Moon consortium, which tours integrated and accessible productions to its participant regional theatres. The ethos of latter initiative in particular has significance to my project’s scope, but as it was in its earliest stages at the time of conducting my research it was not possible to do sufficient justice to its resultant (and ongoing) impact in the eventual write-up.

Nevertheless, each of these examples illustrate a *practical* engagement with the issues raised in the thesis. This is especially evident with regards to “cripping up”. For instance, following another controversy, this time surrounding Natalie Dormer’s casting as a blind pianist in *In Darkness* (July 2018), members of Extant wrote a scathing riposte to the RNIB’s defence of the organisation’s involvement in the film. That was not an academic piece, though, and in the rare case when it is discussed in scholarship (such as by Siebers [2004, who terms it ‘disability drag’], Koppers [2007] and Black and Pretes [2007]) little attention is paid to the reasons behind casting conventions. Any suggestions provided, whilst valid, are exactly that – *suggestions* rather than examinations or solutions. For instance, Black and Pretes (2007) conclude their article on disability representation in films with a lengthy list of aspects which would ameliorate the current state of affairs. Yet it actually serves to underscore the myriad problems without offering potential ways out. I have quoted it in full to emphasise the particular tone and language:

More actors with disabilities should be employed to play major parts. The films we reviewed employed famous actors and actresses, an obvious box office draw. In one sense, if the movie has a positive portrayal of a character with a disability,

the increased viewing audience provided by a big-name star could help increase public awareness. On the other hand, what message is being sent if audiences never see actors with disabilities? In addition, what message is being sent when these same actors win Academy Awards because they were able to portray a character “so different” from themselves? (Nelson, 1994).

More films should have “extras” with disabilities in background scenes that would show natural community presence. Donaldson (1981) reported that of the thousands of people in background scenes in 85 television programs, none had visible disabilities. People with disabilities were invisible in groups of shoppers, spectators, jurors, customers, or workers. We found the same to be true 20 years later. Characters and actors with physical disabilities appeared as extras in the movies we reviewed, but only in scenes at hospitals or rehabilitation centers. People with physical disabilities were noticeably absent from scenes in the community such as another diner, or shopper, or even as a passer-by, confirming the assertion of Harnett (2000) that people with disabilities remain virtually unseen as incidental characters in the community or in secondary roles of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, or friends.

And finally, more films should portray individuals with disabilities as having “typical” emotions, routines, interpersonal conflicts, and in general have plot lines more similar to those in films featuring main characters without disabilities. Films including a character with a disability should not focus on the valiant struggle against the odds, where the disability is the central focus of a person’s life. Instead, we would recommend that feature films portray a person with a disability living a full and rich life where the disability is incidental to the character’s role. We might suggest something akin to an attorney in a wheelchair, who falls in love and has an intimate relationship that has its ups and downs, who has disagreements as well as friendships with co-workers, who is neither a superhero nor a failure, but who lives life unremarkably like most people we meet every day. (82)

Acknowledgement of the vast range of issues concerning disability representation is undoubtedly important, and indeed immensely valuable to my particular project,

because I am exploring the interplay of recruitment and labour processes with representation. Observations like the above recall Dean's (2007) assessment of the industry's adherence to ideas of 'type', especially 'wieldy' symbols (262), which coheres with Sandahl's (2005) emphasis that certain bodies may be read as 'neutral' or not. This also connects back to Quayson's (2007) concept of 'aesthetic nervousness' and the complex responses to representations of disability which lead to its paradoxical absence and presence in social consciousnesses brought out by Mitchell and Snyder (2000) in Chapter One. Consequently, their concept of 'narrative prosthesis', where disability is used as a device rather than considered on its own terms, combined with Levinas' (1979) emphasis on the value of face-to-face recognition as discussed in Chapter Six, could provide a productive link between these representational ideals and the occupational focus of Dean's theories situating performers as formal and informal 'proxies' for the public they represent in the particular context of disability casting. This expansion of her thesis would also connect the work of Hadley (2014), on the literal everyday performance of disabled bodies, to Goffman's (1959) use of theatre as metaphor. With these connections in mind, then, it is crucial that the structures and reasons behind these representational and recruitment practices are investigated more thoroughly. As has been shown by the previous two sections of this review, when applied to disability, the literature suggests that the implementation of Black and Pretes' (2007) suggestions is far more complex than it may at first appear. This is partly due to the fact that they mention employment without properly considering what it means – although this is understandable given that their project's focus was more the kinds, and quality, of representations than who was doing the representing. Additionally, through being published in *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* rather than a journal associated with either film studies or disability studies, their article is placed within a framework of therapeutic intervention instead of analysis or activism. This is also the case, interestingly, with the work of Raynor and Hayward (2009), whose study was published in the *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, although it is important in providing the only published data set and analysis of the experiences of disabled performers that I have thus far been able to find. However, their focus (like that of Black and Pretes) is on the US and Hollywood, which gives credence to Randle and Hardy's (2017) assertion that, prior to their own article,

[t]here appear to be no published studies that examine the workplace experience of disabled workers in contexts where non-standard contracts (such as freelancing) are common, in the creative industries, or in highly qualified or professional work. No major academic research project in the UK has focused exclusively on disabled workers in UKF&TV (453)

Nevertheless, the pertinence of Raynor and Hayward's (2009) work to the project of this thesis is that whilst, like Kupperts (2007) and Black and Pretes (2007), their sample and focus draws on the film industry, they offer one interesting parallel with Dean's work. This is through their discussion of age-related difference in work opportunities. Dean (2005) presents data from Thomas' comprehensive survey of Equity members in 1995 and observes that age has a generally negative effect on cast-ability (and therefore employability), since

[b]efore the age of 40 there are a generally equal number of roles, with men having more roles in electronic media (a ratio of 6:5). Over the age of 40, the picture shifts and men have more roles in general: 10:7; 9:6 in electronic media (Thomas, 1995: ix-xi). (763)

Raynor and Hayward (2009), however, note from their study sample that,

[i]n contrast to overall trends suggesting actors under age 40 years occupy a larger share of roles, those with disabilities aged 40 years and over fared better than their younger counterparts. This difference may be in part due to the large percentage of participants in this study aged 40 years and over. Alternative explanations requiring further investigation include an association of older age with disability, where disability may seem a more appropriate and realistic trait of older persons. This finding also raises the question of whether disability portrayal is viewed as more appropriate or acceptable among characters of a certain gender, ethnicity or age. (45)

Both the significant contrast and the questions regarding the intersection of disability, gender and ethnicity allow for another connection to Dean's theatre and television specific work. This is possible as a result of her more recent EuroFIA report on the intersection of gender and age in the employment experiences of European performers. As noted previously, data on 'ethnicity, sexual orientation and impairments were also

collected' but not used for the purposes of the report (Dean 2008b 8-9). That said, there is specific acknowledgment that 'impairment affects the course of a performer's career' (2008b 11). This is 'noted as relevant more broadly and for future research' (2008b 4, Executive Summary point 3). In the field of theatre studies, the only two examples of such research are found in Kirsty Johnston's (2016) book *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama: Recasting Modernism* and Petra Kuppers' (2017) short guide *Disability and Theatre*. Whilst Johnston's title does signify a certain focus on casting, and her chapter on the subject has particular relevance for this study's discussion of the reclamation and reconfiguration of roles from the dramatic canon, it is not substantially articulated as a 'mainstream' employment issue. Contrastingly, Kuppers (2017) does make reference to employment (14) and, indeed, to 'cripping up' in relation to her overall frame of a theatre visit to a production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. She also observes a paradox which might be related to Hadley's (2014) formulation of unconscious performance, when she states that 'disabled people become guarantors of authenticity [...], not artful shapers who put on shows' (2017 77-78). This also points forward to McGann's (2015) distinction between accuracy and authenticity used in Chapter Six. However, both Kuppers' (2017) and Johnston's (2016) projects are an accessible overview of disability theatre (written both for new readers and scholars) with minimal examination of the place of disability within more 'mainstream' theatre. Crucially, because of the scope and nature of the books, the mention of specific employment issues and their impact is very brief. Moreover, they each elect to expand their focus beyond specific country contexts and consequently do not spend much time with individual economic and employment environments.

What observations about these books in comparison to the IR studies emphasise is a further split, beyond Kuppers' (2017) brief links, between representation and recruitment and labour processes. There is an overall lack of a sense of relevance for the one to the other and vice versa. Given Dean's underscoring of the cultural capital and importance of professional performers' 'working realities' (2008b 8) in their position as creative proxies for the rest of society, this disjunction seems strange. When considered alongside the field of disability studies (and the various 'models' of disability within that), though, it makes slightly more sense and provides a potential explanation. Within disability studies, scholars thinking and writing about representation (from early critics

such as Garland-Thomson to later thinkers like McRuer and Mounsey) reside predominantly at the intersection of the arts and humanities, with, as Tom Shakespeare (2014) phrases it, 'little space for sociological work' (52). This trend leads Shakespeare to state further that,

while welcoming research and debate on cultural representations of disability, there is a balance to be struck [...] disability studies should make space for cultural and historical investigations, but alongside empirical social research on the lives of disabled people and the disabling barriers that they experience. (52)

I have surveyed in this review the potential for interdisciplinary co-operation between theatre studies, disability studies and employment relations. From here, in much the same manner as I responded to Randle and Hardy's (2017) desire for expansion on their analysis of employment, I seek to address the current gap in comprehension of disability casting conventions as a space for shared conversations regarding representation and recruitment. Through an analysis of the structures behind the conventions of casting, and labour processes, around disability within the country-specific context of UK theatre and television, and their representational ramifications, I aim to answer the call of Foster and Williams (2014) for greater 'understanding of how such expectations change over professional career life cycles including studying, qualifying, registering and working in differing professions or even country contexts' (18). I also honour – in my comparison and contrast of the two forms – Eikhof and Warhurst's (2013) request for further research 'that analyses differences amongst the different creative industries and which investigates which industries do well/badly and why with respect to equal opportunities, and from which lessons can be generated about good practice' (505).

With this background, alongside my aim to provide an outline of disability and impairment's position as employment issues in UK theatre and television, my research questions for this study are as follows:

'What is the relationship between representations of disability and recruitment and selection of disabled performers?' and 'Why is the relationship configured in these ways?'

Acknowledging the sense of progression and purpose wished for by these theorists, the next chapter moves from outlining existing scholarship to establishing my own multimodal methodological framework.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

Following the previous chapter's contextual review, this chapter outlines the methodological approach to the research questions developed there. It responds to the literature discussed, and especially the synergies set out in the final section, to underscore the ways in which the thesis either connects to or deviates from previous scholarship. It consequently provides links across multiple disciplines and modes of research, found especially in the combination of text and performance-based analysis with interviews with practitioners. In examining the framework for this process, it also interrogates the issues therein, and problems and possibilities encountered and either overcome or embraced.

#### *My self-situation and its implications*

The primary link between disciplines is not through the literature, but between my artistic and academic work, and is found in the initial impetus for this research – my personal practice as a performer/theatre-maker. I therefore begin by exploring my self-situation in relation to my research area, since it will necessarily have influenced my approach to the methodological framework, as well as the approaches and responses of others towards it (and towards me, during the participatory elements of the study, discussed below). Such an acknowledgement is made by Jen Rinaldi, who states that explicitly positional scholarship 'has been of tremendous importance to disability research, aiding in the paradigmatic shift from research about, to research by and for, disabled people' (2013 n.p.). It is also consistent with wider social justice methodologies like standpoint theory. Sandra Harding, one of the earliest feminist proponents of this theoretical position, reminds in a retrospective article on its significance that 'standpoint theory claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles *advance* the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry' (2004 26, her emphasis).

However, my own relationship with standpoint theory is complex, even fraught, in part due to the fact that (as a full-time powered wheelchair user with Cerebral Palsy) I cannot stand independently. This statement is more than a facetious pun. Like the title of the thesis as a whole, it serves as a simple but pertinent example of the difficulties

with language around disability and impairment outlined in Chapter One and in the first section of Chapter Two, as well as illustrating the apparent lack of consideration of disabled people in the theory's construction and of any mention of us among the socially and scholarly-marginalised groups who might benefit from its application. For instance, in her retrospective discussion of its impact (admittedly written as direct acknowledgement of its controversial reputation in scientific discourse), Harding clarifies:

standpoint theory is more about the creation of groups' consciousnesses than about shifts in the consciousnesses of individuals. An oppressed group has to come to understand that each member is oppressed because she or he is a member of that group—*Black, Jewish, women, poor, or lesbian*—not because he or she individually deserves to be oppressed. (2004 32, my emphasis)

Whilst disability and impairment are not the only omissions from this list of groups, since other racial, gender and sexual identities could also be included, they are conspicuous in their absence as a category. This wider issue is articulated by Jillian Weise in 'Common Cyborg' (2018), her commentary on another standpoint theorist, Donna Haraway's, 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985). Stating, 'Disabled people who use tech to live are cyborgs. Our lives are not metaphors' (2018 n.p.), Weise critiques how '[t]he manifesto coopts cyborg identity while eliminating reference to disabled people on which the notion of the cyborg is premised'. In a manner similar to Goffman's (1956, 1959) few references to disability discussed in Chapter Two, Weise observes that Haraway 'does gesture briefly' toward it in the form of Anne McCaffery's sci-fi novel *The Ship Who Sang* (1969), where 'parents of children with disabilities may choose to stunt their growth, contain them in a titanium shell, and plug their brains into circuitry' (Weise 2018 n.p.). Weise subsequently evokes the case of Ashley X, a disabled girl whose parents opted for her to undergo a hysterectomy and breast bud removal (cf. Kafer 2013), in order, they felt, to simplify her engagement with adulthood. Such connections and contradictions between lived experience and both fictional and scholarly representation are at the crux of this thesis' analytical project, but Weise's points show that they have *methodological* implications too, in this case by potentially rendering an established theoretical framework not merely inaccessible but exclusionary.

This possible paradox, comparable to that outlined by Alison Kafer (2013) when formulating the alternative political/relational model of disability examined in Chapter Two, returns the discussion here to Jen Rinaldi (2013). Having acknowledged the historic importance of self-situation, Rinaldi goes on to caution that ‘the call for reflexivity is often framed with the use of binary identity categories: oppressed or privileged, disabled or nondisabled. When researchers do not position themselves in their work, they may well be positioned anyway’ (2013 n.p.). Combining this caution with an interest in ‘how researchers are read when they refuse to self-disclose’, Rinaldi seeks to mount ‘a modest challenge to the use of narrative in disability studies, specifically the pressure to provide one’ (2013 n.p.). The issues around binaries and narrative are returned to throughout both this chapter and this thesis. They are posed at this particular point because Rinaldi offers an example of the way in which, as Leslie McCall phrases it, ‘research practice mirrors the complexity of social life, calling up unique methodological demands’ (2005 1772). Rinaldi shows how researchers’ experiences of *conducting* our research can sometimes not merely correlate, but *coalesce* or *converge* with the experiences recounted by participants about the field of research – and this is the most continually relevant theme of this methodological discussion. In language reminiscent of Kafer’s (2013) desire for more inclusive models of disability, as well as McRuer’s (2006) articulation of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’, Rinaldi underscores the ongoing work involved in navigating disability identity and disclosure, stating, ‘I could expose myself, I could work at overturning misconceptions about disability by sharing my experience, but doing so requires sustained, repeated effort, and is difficult every time’ (Rinaldi 2013 n.p.). Moreover, in the conclusion to her article, she acknowledges the following dilemma:

I am caught up in a contradiction, exploring my own position to fetter out the limits to positionality, taking up the defense of other entry points into research all the while using the common point of entry. It is not my intention to argue that we need to do away with our methodologies, for even I find them valuable. My purpose has instead been to illustrate that there are complications to coming out, that at least my coming out comes with baggage, and that not all moments of coming out lead to a community embrace. Within the span of this paper, I meant not merely to self-identify, but to express the discomfort that accompanies my

self-identification, so that I might further the discourses around the call to disclose.

I remain unconvinced that we have enough safe spaces, even and especially in our own field, for all of our stories. Until that day comes, I would like to think it is possible for a researcher to practice reflexivity without publicly taking a position, to conduct responsible research all the while working quietly. (Rinaldi 2013 n.p.)

I cite her in such detail because her perspective has multiple resonances for the methodology of this thesis. It is not only integral to the research questions, the phrases ‘a community embrace’ and ‘for all of our stories’ being evocative of debates about who can and ought to ‘give voice’ or provide representation, but it reflects the testimony of many of my participants, especially around disclosure, as is evident in the discussion of the empirical data across Chapters Four to Six. It is also, however, reminiscent of my own anxieties (in the combined colloquial and clinical senses of that word) as a fellow researcher. As will be explored below, much of my methodological considerations revolved around the impact of my *physical* – and consequently visible – impairment(s) on the proposed project. Yet, despite their discernible prevalence and the continually necessary navigation of their effects (cf. Thomas 1999; Foster and Williams 2014; Williams and Mavin 2013), the aspects of my lived experience as a disabled researcher which required more management in actuality were those relating to my *mental* health. Furthermore, whilst these symptoms might understandably appear in response to events like bereavement or other trauma (as is evident in the dedicatory passage beginning the thesis), most instances of their impact on my engagement with the world are in fact more insidious and pervasive. As such it would be inaccurate and inauthentic to attach them, or trace their origins, solely to specific occurrences.

I realise this additional disclosure on my part entails confronting a conundrum similar to Rinaldi’s, in that an illustration of my hidden impairments to emphasise their covertness has the precise effect of ensuring their *overt*ness. Again, though, this is consistent with my participants’ experiences – and, like Rinaldi, I do not advocate that ‘we need to do away with our methodologies’; merely that we interrogate their meanings and coherence. Moreover, such positioning bears directly on not just the

choice of methodology but of the project itself, because the combination of my personal and professional self-situations underscores how necessary it was (emotionally and physically as well as ethically) that I cultivate a certain level of academic distance if aiming to conduct research on this topic. The remainder of this chapter explores the manner in which I initially sought this distance, before outlining the ultimate framework of my eventual project.

### ***My project's situation and its implications***

#### ***Methodology in theory – designing my study: theoretical bases***

When first considering conducting research into casting conventions concerning disability and impairment and a primary focus on ‘cripping up’ or ‘disability drag’, it seemed most sensible to stay solely within the realms of theatre and performance Studies, where (along with English and comparative literary studies) the majority of my previous academic work had been situated. This supposition of sense and safety arose in part because analysis of fictional representations and tropes through examining written theatrical texts and live performance moments appeared to provide the requisite distance which would make enquiry manageable. However, initial investigations whilst formulating my proposal made it clear this belief was false, for several reasons. Firstly, despite the fact that the statistics relating to the convention of ‘cripping up’ given in Chapter One were from the US, their parallel prevalence in the UK context was palpable even during the period of preliminary information gathering for the purpose of PhD applications. This could have rendered my proposal little more than a litany of examples for potential study, with comparable consequences for my eventual project. It was not at all conducive to the distance desired by either emotions or ethics. Secondly, even engagement with solely fictional representations usually entails a significant amount of immersion in aspects of disability history. These, along with the depiction of sometimes harmful tropes, are often a strain to absorb, never mind assess (cf. Garland Thomson 1997; Mitchell and Snyder 2001; Titchkosky 2007; Quayson 2007). Thirdly, a combination of my personal practice as a performer and previous ‘creative’ academic projects had made me acutely aware of the multiple meanings of representation, and how positive *artistic* elements of a production did not always equate to representation in other areas, like employment – and especially in what I

would now term the recruitment and selection processes specific to performance work, such as casting and drama school auditions. This latter point in particular led me to understand that a wider scope of study was necessary; one which required a foray into new fields, incorporating aspects of Industrial Relations and Human Resources Management.

The shift to multidisciplinary working, which served latterly as a scholarly response to the 'little space for sociological work' observed by Shakespeare (2014 52) within cultural approaches to disability studies, more immediately and practically also facilitated the inclusion of participatory interviews in the research methodology, because a consideration of disability casting conventions as an employment issue entailed engaging with the experiences of practitioners. Consequently, as well as a participatory project, it might be labelled as *emancipatory*. This is a category consistent with evocations of standpoint theory earlier in the discussion, and also with Oscar Holmes IV's very recent (2019) article which explicitly connects multiple kinds of representation through its title, 'For diversity scholars who have considered activism when scholarship isn't enough!' In tribute to Ntozake Shange's choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (Broadway premiere 1976), he invokes the power of 'this amazing play [which] consisted of 20 separate poems that are accompanied by dances and music and powerfully delivered by seven black women who are only identified by the colors they wear as Lady in Red, Lady in Blue, Lady in Purple, Yellow, Brown, Green and Orange'. (Holmes IV 2019 n.p.). In full cognisance of my white privilege, this reference has two aspects of relevance here. Alongside the fact that Holmes IV's impassioned homage correlates with my own experience of studying Shange's work as a disabled undergraduate and finding in it a language of marginalisation which was personally transformative and led directly to my discovery of parallel discourses from the perspective of disability studies, he uses it further to advocate for scope beyond theoretical analysis, stating,

we, as diversity scholars also have complex stories, complex identities, complex problems and perhaps most interestingly, complex agendas such that despite all the greatness that we produce with our scholarship, scholarship too is simply not enough. As diversity scholars, we are called to do the work of scholarship, but I

believe that we are also called to do the work beyond scholarship, which I contend is activism (Holmes IV 2019 n.p.)

That a play, and one overtly situated as performative through its designation as a *choreopoem* (i.e. explicitly imbued with movement), should be chosen as a site for this call to activism is a pertinent point in the particular context of this thesis' area of study. Its significance is returned to in the section of this methodology which deals with the entwining of interview data and text- and performance-based analysis of shows. Here, the importance of the above quotation is found in its function as the preface for another, as follows. Having outlined some of the practical reasons to exist as what he terms 'scholar-activists', such as translating research for the general public, Holmes IV goes on to acknowledge his own initial anxiety about the impact of more active political work on his academic career – and all the queries he had. Nevertheless, he insists, 'the bigger, more important question to me was, could I look myself in the mirror and call myself a Diversity Scholar if I did not actively fight for freedom and that was a resounding no for me' (Holmes IV 2019 n.p.).

This is a powerful personal statement in its own right, but it also reflects wider debates around the nature of research, in similar veins to the points posed by standpoint theory above. As Humphries notes whilst conducting a critical examination of these debates, in the emancipatory framework,

[n]eutrality is seen as problematic, arising from an objectivism which assumes scientific knowledge is free from social construction. What is required is research which "brings to voice" excluded and marginalised groups as subjects rather than objects of research, and which attempts to understand the world *in order to change it* (1997 para. 2.6)

On first reading, such a perspective seems coherent with the fundamental research focus of this study, which seeks to explore the interplay between representation and recruitment in disability casting through combining the lived experiences of professional practitioners with analyses of the structures, practices and processes of several productions. However, as with standpoint theory above, such an association is not uncomplicated – nor is the inclusion of the above aspects in a project necessarily enough to designate it as emancipatory. As Humphries cautions, '[e]mancipation cannot

be conferred on one group by another. Martin's (1994, 1996) descriptions of experiences of feminist participatory research return again and again to this contradiction. In her attempts to share power as a researcher, she is inevitably implicated in power in the process' (1997 para. 3.5). Consequently, when occupying an investigative scholarly role, it is vital to be 'paradoxically aware of our own complicity in what we critique' (para. 4.10).

This assertion is explored further below, in relation to the practicalities of the interview setup(s), but is relevant here in that similar complexities are raised in the specific context of disability research. For instance, Danieli and Woodhams note that '[a]ctive participation in the research process is seen as a transformative experience in itself, acting as a form of consciousness raising for the participants and so is potentially emancipatory' (2004 285). Such perspectives are consistent both with Rowley (2012), who suggests that 'the interviewee may welcome the opportunity to reflect on and talk about a topic in which they are interested, and they may recognize that they will learn something useful from this process' (266), and with the responses of my own participants. Alongside initial lists of pertinent themes raised during conversations, my fieldwork journals detail my repeated surprise that, in our 'leaving' interactions (Weller 2017), many participants were grateful not merely for the opportunity to talk but for the very fact that I was conducting the research. Interestingly, too, this was not specific either to a particular demographic or professional position, which engages with a further observation from Danieli and Woodhams, who ask,

[b]ut can the same principle be applied when researching the powerful? Can participatory emancipatory research be adopted with, for example, managers who may have different agendas to those of the disability rights movement? (2004 289)

These questions are particularly pertinent in the context of my research for several reasons. Firstly, in response to the relative paucity of literature on performance as work both more generally and specifically with regards to disability that was discussed in Chapter Two, it was essential to engage with the current structures of the theatre and television industries more widely to ensure a proper perspective on the issues being analysed. This involved, as Danieli and Woodhams phrase it, 'researching social

institutions and actors who may be partly responsible for creating disabling environments' (2004 293). Secondly, my aim of answering Foster and Williams' call for 'greater understanding of how such expectations change over professional career life cycles including studying, qualifying, registering and working' (2014 18) required a comprehension, in line both with the literature discussed in Chapter Two and the data collected from participants during the subsequent study, that many of the performance-related professional arenas under analysis – most especially that of casting – were not populated by disabled people. Thirdly, given the heterogeneity in experience of disability and impairment discussed in Chapter Two (foregrounded particularly by Kafer [2013], Shakespeare [2014] and Mounsey [2014]), as well as the fraught nature of disclosure emphasised by Rinaldi (2013) above, it was vital to acknowledge 'that differences within the social category of "disabled" may impact on whether individuals *do* perceive themselves as disabled—either by their impairments or by society' (Danieli and Woodhams 2004 291).

Moreover, returning to Humphries' reminder that '[e]mancipation cannot be conferred on one group by another' (1997 para 3.5), it is important also to remember the possibility 'that research can only be judged as emancipatory after the event' (Danieli and Woodhams 2004 292). Indeed, in a manner similar to the much later sentiments of Oscar Holmes IV, who was 'initially afraid of professional consequences' (2019 n.p.), Danieli and Woodhams suggest that (if a project is explicitly aligned with a theoretical field such as disability studies, which has connections to an associated *political* movement) its findings 'may be more easily dismissed by policy makers as ideologically biased research and therefore the aims of producing knowledge which disabled people can use for their self-emancipation may be diminished rather than increased' (2004 292).

As a consequence of these caveats, along with Code's observation that '[b]ecause those who are socially marginalized cannot realize their emancipatory goals without understanding the intractable aspects and the malleable, contestable features of the world, they have to achieve a fit between knowledge and "reality", even when "reality" consists in such social artefacts as racism, power, oppression or pay equity' (2014 11), this project is not situated as explicitly emancipatory. Instead, to use the language of Holmes IV (2019), I position it more broadly as *activist*. This designation is better

articulated below, in connecting the participatory elements with the text- and performance-based analyses, but here, following Humphries, I seek to 'lay the groundwork for praxis-oriented research which can open up *new possibilities* for emancipatory action' (1997 para 4.10, my emphasis). Thereby, this project

will acknowledge the *practice* of liberty – it is not something which can be conferred; it is not something gained once and for all, but has a view of power as fluid, a back and forward movement rather than binary; which is available to dominated groups; which is multifaceted and contradictory; which recognizes both discursive and material realities; which is historically and culturally specific; and which is grounded in the struggle for survival of the most disadvantaged and the poorest, not in the privileging of the researcher or other groups as the norm or referent. (para. 4.10)

All of that said, to return to the combined contributions of McCall (2005) and Rinaldi (2013) cited earlier, if the idea that 'research practice mirrors the complexity of social life' (McCall 2005 1772), and evocations of the 'work at overturning misconceptions about disability [which] requires sustained, repeated effort, and is difficult every time' (Rinaldi 2013 n.p.), are taken together, then my very presence as a disabled researcher conducting this project and as a student gaining her PhD might be posed as emancipatory – for myself. Such connections (both positive and negative) between my experience as a researcher and those of my participants will continue to be traced throughout the following sections of this methodology, but in the context of academia they reflect an observation by Code (2014), albeit from a gender studies rather than disability studies perspective. She states:

[s]o long as the view prevails that women cannot know according to the highest criteria for establishing knowledge, it seems that they are in fact not just marginalized but excluded, confined somewhere beyond the limits of both marginality and centrality. [... ]n at least one sense of the word, in one central exclusionary preserve – namely, universities and other institutions of higher education – when women are refused admission then the implication seems to be that they cannot know, that they are incapable of, not marginalized within, the kinds of knowledge disseminated there. (10)

From these theoretical bases, which acknowledge ‘the tensions and contradictions in [my] research practice’ (Humphries 1997 para. 4.10), I move to outline the design of the study which resulted from them.

***Methodology in theory – designing my study: constituent components***

Having mentioned the inclusion of interviews at various points throughout the previous section, it is now important to detail and discuss the reasons for their selection as a form of data gathering. Firstly, for a project considering the nature of conventions behind theatrical and televisual representations of disability and their interplay with recruitment, it seemed not only apposite but necessary that form replicate content, and that participatory elements of the study allowed for the representation of practitioners’ lived experience in this profession on their own terms and in their own words. Secondly, connecting this artistic impulse to the field of disability studies, I wanted to ‘represent fairly the experiences of my interviewees’ and ‘not use techniques which obscure the voice of participants, for example formal structured interviews or questionnaires’ (Shakespeare 1997 249). Alongside these considerations about ‘voice’, which I would expand to encompass all narrative qualities of interviews, there were some additional aspects related to accessibility to incorporate and ensure were secure. Again an example of form replicating content as well as emphasising the parity of experience for researcher and research in this context, these adjustments are discussed further in the next section, which focuses on the practicalities of implementing the study. Here, however, in line with Shakespeare’s (1997) particular warning against ‘formal structured interviews’, it is first important to delineate the format chosen and its implications.

In just such a discussion, framed for ‘novice researchers’, Rowley states:

[b]y interviews, we mean face-to-face verbal exchanges in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee. The interviewee may be invited to talk about their own attitudes, beliefs, behaviours or experiences, as a citizen, user, consumer or employee. In research in organizational studies, management and business, the interviewee may be selected either as an individual or as a representative of their team, organization, or industry (2012 260).

This definition is cited in full partly for the purpose of troubling it later, especially its initial description of ‘face-to-face verbal exchanges in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee’, but it does provide a useful beginning by pointing to the fact that interviewees ‘may be selected either as an individual or as a representative of their team, organization, or industry’. Both were the case for some of my participants, the demographic and professional profiles of whom are detailed towards the end of this section. Moreover, following her definition, Rowley goes on to report that ‘[t]he most common type of interview is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews take on a variety of different forms, with varying numbers of questions, and varying degrees of adaptation of questions and question order to accommodate the interviewee’ (2012 262). My own interviews nominally conformed to this ‘most common type’ although, as mentioned above in relation to Shakespeare, the requirement to ‘accommodate the interviewee’ (Rowley 2012 262) entailed more practical flexibility and adaptation than is probably meant by Rowley in her comment. Furthermore, such strict categorisation of different types of interviews may, in reality, be neither helpful nor accurate. As Ribbens (1989) notes, whilst discussing the construction of studies involving interviews,

[a]t the outset, we must recognise the variability of purposes and styles of research relations we may enter into. Interviews tend to be dichotomised under headings such as structured/unstructured, focussed/unfocussed, depth interviews/questionnaire interviews. As researchers we may be over-concerned to know where we fit into these classifications, rather than considering more carefully what we are doing in our own unique project, and what sort of relations we can expect to develop within that. (580)

This reminder is especially pertinent within the context of *my* ‘own unique project’ because of the way, as is illustrated at the end of this chapter, the empirical data is ultimately situated within text- and performance-based analyses. Such reconsiderations of categories as those proposed by Ribbens continue the disruption of binaries which is characteristic of the thesis more generally. Further, though, they allow acknowledgement of the fact that, for a variety of reasons discussed below, the majority of my interviews might actually be positioned more as *unstructured* than as *semi-*

structured; whilst some ended up being highly structured. However, before broaching these practicalities, which vary according to participants' individual requirements and requests, I consider the manner in which these participants were sought and gathered.

To return to Rowley's suggestion that 'the interviewee may welcome the opportunity to reflect on and talk about a topic in which they are interested' (2012 266), Ribbens similarly observes that, '[i]n qualitative research, where a random sample is often not sought, researchers are often happy to interview people who have volunteered. Motivation may thus be assured' (1989 582). The key point here, though, is not so much the motivation as the type of sample, since the one forming the basis of this study was indeed not random. Rather it was procured through 'snowballing, the process of "gathering" interviewees, by asking initial contacts or interviewees to recommend other potential interviewees' (Rowley 2012 265), using what Morgan (2008) terms 'a small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for a study' (816). Noting that '[t]his method is particularly useful for locating hidden populations', Morgan states that snowballing is

a useful way to pursue the goals of purposive sampling in many situations where there are no lists or other obvious sources for locating members of the population of interest, but it does require that the participants are likely to know others who share the characteristics that make them eligible for inclusion in the study. (816)

The caveat he places on the method's utility is especially interesting alongside my area of research. The fact that 'it does require that the participants are likely to know others who share the characteristics that make them eligible' means my recourse to it as a researcher constitutes another instance of my experience matching that of the majority of my performer participants, because I was just as reliant on gatekeepers to facilitate the advancement of my study as they were – and are – in facilitating that of their careers. The demographic and professional composition of these eventually procured participants will be detailed shortly. Prior to that, however, I should note that Morgan's cautionary reminder of the limitations of the method does have some valid elements, particularly in his observation that it 'poses a distinct risk of capturing a biased subset

of the total population of potential participants [...] The best defense against this problem is to begin with a set of initial informants that are as diverse as possible' (2008 816).

Such evocations of diversity reflect two further aspects of relevance to this study. These are the heterogeneity of disability as a social category, which has been previously been mentioned, and intersectionality, which has not, save for its appearance as a descriptor of the cast and ethos of the recent productions of *Emilia* (2018, 2019). Starting with the latter, intersectionality was developed as a theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) to articulate the multiple oppressions experienced by Black women due to their existence at the intersection of race and gender. Therefore, as with my citation of Oscar Holmes IV's (2019) call to become scholar-activists, my engagement with the term is inflected by an acknowledgement of my white privilege, as well as my debt to scholars of colour, in particular Ato Quayson (2017)'s work on Beckett, as well the methodological importance of Holmes and Crenshaw. This point additionally evokes the disability-specific work of Chris Bell (2006), who distinguishes between 'Disability Studies' and 'White Disability Studies'. For Bell,

[i]n contradistinction to Disability Studies, White Disability Studies recognizes its tendency to whitewash disability history, ontology and phenomenology. White Disability Studies, while not wholeheartedly excluding people of color from its critique, by and large focuses on the work of white individuals and is itself largely produced by a corps of white scholars and activists. (275)

With all this in mind, it is also important to observe, after McBride et al. (2014), that

the concept of intersectionality has been re-interpreted since Crenshaw's original usage. Rather than referring just to the intersection of racism and sexism (or race and gender) and thereby creating a focus on the experience of black and minority ethnic women, later interpretations have emphasized its potential to refer to the intersection of a broader range of oppressions (e.g. ageism, class) or social groupings (e.g. age, sexuality, disability). (2)

Interestingly, with this expanded definition, McBride et al. also provide one of the few examples of critical writing on the topic of diversity as a general subject in employment relations which includes disability among the constituent parts of its analysis. A point of additional pertinence to this study is their suggestion that this expansion, and its subsequently wider adoption in popular discourse among marginalised groups, 'has not been matched by the application of this concept to the field of work and employment relations [which] has led to missed opportunities in the understanding and theorization of the diversity of experiences in studies of work and employment relations' (2014 2). Considering potential solutions for this apparent absence of enquiry, they posit that '[o]ne way forward is to separate out the fundamental need for *all* researchers to be intersectionally sensitive (or aware) from the needs of a smaller number who may wish to do intersectional research' (4). I would position my own work in this particular study as (nominally) belonging to the first category (i.e. intersectionally sensitive or aware). That said, the heterogeneity of lived experience of disability and the concurrent variety of impairment and impairment effects (Thomas 1999), along with the necessary engagement with non-disabled people that both the study and its area of focus required, could in fact position it as *explicitly* intersectional research. Further corroborated by the parallel presence of gender, race and sexuality both within participants' contributions and the theatre and television productions chosen for text- and performance-based analysis, this suggestion poses the intersectionality of the study as being specifically interested in 'experiences *within* a given category (intracategorical)' (McBride et al. 2014 5).

This designation is taken from McCall (2005). Previously cited in relation to Rinaldi's (2013) questioning of reflexivity in disability research, McCall's more prominent contribution to this methodology is found in the delineation of three approaches to intersectional enquiry. She states that intracategorical research

interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself [...] it acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time [...] This approach is called *intracategorical complexity* because authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection—"people whose identity crosses the

boundaries of traditionally constructed groups” (Dill 2002, 5)—in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups. (2005 1773-1774)

The reinforcement of the importance of complexity in the final sentence of the above quotation both prefigures and recalls Morgan’s (2008) insistence on a sufficiently diverse initial pool of informants in a snowballing process. It also points to the necessity of diversity in the eventual sample, as well as those participants cited in the writing up of the study, because, as McCall further notes, ‘[p]ersonal narratives may aspire to situate subjects within the full network of relationships that define their social locations, but usually it is only possible to situate them from the partial perspective of the particular social group under study’ (2005 1781).

With this in mind, I now offer a more detailed breakdown of the nature of the eventual sample. I should note here that, as the number of participants in particular categories is small and therefore more easily identifiable, several requested anonymity or required no specific reference to their individual characteristics. The discussion of sample characteristics is therefore separate to the range of participants’ occupational roles given below. The overall number of participants was fifty-one, who identified themselves as belonging to various different industry categories, as follows: performers, writers, directors, producers, casting directors, casting assistants and drama school employees. The majority were freelance practitioners, although some (particularly from the casting and drama school perspectives) were attached to companies. They predominantly contributed in personal capacities, but I also interviewed five people whose roles were specific to their organisations; as such these latter participants are coded accordingly alongside their contributions, except where anonymity was requested. Relevant abbreviations for all categories and individuals are listed at the beginning of the thesis. Additionally, some participants were selected due to their association with the productions chosen for text- and performance-based analysis, as elaborated on below. For participants belonging to the various industry categories, the splits were as follows (N.B. the total of these figures exceeds the overall number of participants as many considered their work to exist in multiple forms):

Performers – 23

Writers – 12

Directors – 15

Producers – 7

Casting Directors – 3

Casting Assistants – 1

Drama School – 2

In terms of gender, the split was thirty-three women to nineteen men. This adherence to the binary was not deliberate, but simply reflects the fact that no participants self-identified as trans, transgender, non-binary, genderqueer or related identities during discussions. Similarly, due to an awareness in the wider project with regards to sensitivities and difficulties around disclosure, sexuality was not noted initially – and, although several participants did mention their orientation in the course of conversations, some disclosed *outside* discussions but did not raise it as a relevant topic whilst talking. Conversely, racial privilege was a very prevalent point of discussion among participants of all ethnicities, so the specifics of *that* split are pertinent, with four identifying as people of colour (one South Asian, one Black and two mixed race) and forty-seven as White. It is also important to note that the racial diversity of the eventual sample was impacted by the limited availability of some desired participants, which is discussed as a wider issue in the next section on practicalities. With regards to disability and impairment (the study's focus) data *were* collected, in part to address the initial interest in the casting convention of 'cripping up'. However, in cognisance of issues around disclosure and the heterogeneity of experience raised both in this methodology and participants' contributions, the splits are not detailed here. Rather, throughout the thesis, impairments are both disclosed and discussed, but are not dwelt on unless by the participant themselves. This is partly to illustrate the fluidity of identification and because impairments often become as implicit as individuals' experience of their professional area of practice.

As much as the above delineation of the sample emphasises areas of coherence in participants' demographics and contributions, it exposes as many gaps and as much potential for further enquiry. In so doing, it situates the study as a beginning, and an initial attempt to map out the structures and professional experiences within the UK theatre and television industries as marked by disability. It thereby correlates with McCall's assertion that

[p]ersonal narratives and single-group studies derive their strength from the partial crystallization of social relations in the identities of particular social groups. Whether the narrative is literary, historical, discursive, ideological, or autobiographical, it begins somewhere, and that beginning represents only one of many sides of a set of intersecting social relations, not social relations in their entirety (2005 1781-1782)

This quotation's evocation of, and distinction between, 'a set of intersecting social relations, not social relations in their entirety' is addressed in Chapter Seven as a possible area for further work. Here, however, the pertinent point is the reference to multiple kinds of narratives – 'literary, historical, discursive, ideological, or autobiographical'. Along with Rowley's reminder that conducting even a small number of interviews allows a researcher to 'start to become familiar with the various key points being made by the respondents, and start to understand their various perspectives' (2012 267), McCall's comment on narrative provides a connection to the other significant aspect of this study's design – the return to my original field of theatre studies and choice of text- and performance-based analysis of particular productions. They offered a frame for the 'various key points' and 'various perspectives' of participants (Rowley 2012 267) as well as the opportunity to emphasise the differences in convention behind various creative forms.

Consequently, although they are not directly analogous to traditional case studies, they do perform a similar function. As McCall notes '[c]ase studies and qualitative research more generally have always been distinguished by their ability to delve into the complexities of social life—to reveal diversity, variation, and heterogeneity' (2005 1782). This capacity is particularly methodologically important given Van Maanen et al.'s observation that 'the flow of research is lengthy and uneven, is seen most clearly in hindsight, and, perhaps most important, is contextually idiosyncratic, often chaotic, and always personal' (2007 1146). It also harks back to Holmes IV's usage of the choreopoem *For Colored Girls...* as a catalyst for his argument around activism in academia, by way of Code's (2014) reminder that 'cross-fertilizations across disciplines and methods have often proven more productive than adherence to any methodological orthodoxy' (12). In a thesis which posits in part that the interplay of representation and recruitment in casting can be considered as a site of potential creative activism, it

seemed both apt and important that particular examples of that interplay serve as boundaries and bridges for the wider discussion. Similarly, interview data either engages directly with the examples offered by productions or with the wider issues they invoke, and the evidence of each is either corroborated or queried. Such an approach evokes and coheres with Kershaw's (2013 [1992]) suggestion 'that the micro-level of individual shows and the macro-level of the socio-political order might somehow productively interact' (1).

In order to facilitate this interaction, some participants were selected because their professional connection to *Not I*, *Wicked* or *Call the Midwife* allowed analysis of the representational qualities and labour processes of each of those shows. Ultimately, interviews with members of the writing and casting teams for *Wicked* and *Call the Midwife* were unfeasible. With *Wicked*, this was because my contacts were current performers with no wider connection to the production team. With *Call the Midwife*, it was in part due to difficulties matching availability (with writers) despite earnest interest, but mostly (with casting directors) because my connection with the BBC was predicated on my *own* position as a performer instead of my research capacity. In October 2017, I gained a place on Class Act, a three-day in-house course for D/deaf and disabled performers. This provided mentoring, informative panels and scenes for showreels. It also culminated in a networking event with industry guests, facilitating interaction with several of my eventual casting participants which would otherwise have been impossible. However, as the production company for *Call the Midwife* (Neal St Productions) is external rather than in-house, contact with specific casting directors proved difficult. This has two research implications. Firstly, my subsequent analysis of empirical data is necessarily weighted more towards experiences of *being cast* than of *doing the casting*. Hopes for a further project would be to focus more on the latter perspective. Secondly, though, as referenced above regarding 'snowball sampling' and gatekeepers more generally, difficulties connecting with casting directors were one of the most prominent themes for my disabled performer participants. Consequently, in this case, my parallel perspectives as researcher and performer might serve to augment rather than mitigate my comprehension of dilemmas expressed during interviews. Either way, this observation of research implications (along with the combined strategy of situating empirical data within analysis of productions) is consistent with another

suggestion from Van Maanen et al., who posit that '[t]heory can drive method through its level of analysis, its stage of articulation, the types of constructs it proposes, and its descriptive or prescriptive nature' (2007 1147). Such an explicit link between theory and method seemingly also evokes the possibilities proposed by the practical application of both, and the conversations which might occur between them. These are the subject of the next section, which considers the practical logistics involved in the performance of the project itself.

### ***Methodology in practice – conducting my study***

The deliberate use of 'performance' above is hopefully evident given the wider context of this study's focus. However it has additional relevance here, because the connection between theory and method called for by Van Maanen et al. (2007) may be found not just in the contributions of participants but the environments in which they were collected. This possibility is in line with the perspective of Alvesson and Kärreman, who 'emphasize the potential of empirical material as a resource for developing theoretical ideas through the active mobilization and problematization of existing frameworks' (2007 1265). They argue that 'empirical material may be mobilized as a critical dialogue partner—not a judge or a mirror—that problematizes a significant form of understanding' (1266). With this in mind, alongside Paulus et al.'s call that scholars should 'go beyond prescriptions, theories, or rhetorical arguments about what *should* be done to describing and reflecting on what *was* done and the insights to be gained' (2017 751), this final section considers the implications of disability, impairment and accessibility for earlier discussions about the fundamental nature of interviews and participatory research.

Returning to Rowley's initial definition of interviews as 'face-to-face verbal exchanges in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee' (2012 260), the section will analyse each aspect of it separately, alongside the perspectives of other theorists and the practical elements of my participatory study. Taking the power dynamic, and its explicit inference of 'one person [and] another person', first, this is troubled by Claire Tregaskis and Dan Goodley (2005), who propose 'a relational method of research production' which 'begin[s] to challenge at both theoretical and practical levels the commonsense

assumption of a binary opposition that separates disabled and non-disabled people' (2005 365). As well as reiterating the instability of binaries in the context of disability more generally, this statement engages with notions of a single interviewer in several ways. Firstly, as evinced by Tregaskis and Goodley's jointly-authored article, it foregrounds the possibility of co-researchers. Secondly, and more pertinently to my particular project, it acknowledges that even a single researcher may need significant support to complete various aspects of their study. Arguably, more than is readily observed, this is the case regardless of the presence of impairment on the part of the researcher, such as is shown by the #ThanksForTyping Twitter discussions around wives' historical support of their husbands' scholarly careers (cf. Daro 2017). Yet it is certainly more prevalent for disabled researchers – and disabled people generally – and this theme features as one of the most prominent in the empirical data. Here, though, it relates to the fact that in person, or face-to-face meetings required the presence of an academic assistant (or several) to help me set up and navigate the recording equipment during the discussion, and with the transcriptions afterwards.

The additional practical considerations that were required to encompass a range of impairments and impairment effects, for participants as well as myself, are dealt with shortly. On a purely ethical level, though, in a study of which a central concern was accessibility in the workplace, it was important to ensure as far as was reasonable that the methods did not perpetuate the exact problems they sought to investigate, for anyone involved. As Shakespeare notes:

Impairment does not need to determine the outcome of interactions. After all, many people with highly visible impairments or communication difficulties manage social interactions very successfully. But, on average, such impairments do contribute to the social isolation of many disabled people. Those who achieve interaction do so by what Fred Davis (1964) called “normalizing”: going more than halfway, by enabling the nondisabled person to go beyond their preoccupation with the impairment, and finding what they both have in common. (2014 199)

Reminiscent of Goffman (1956, 1959), Garland Thomson (1997, 2009) and Hadley's (2014) theories discussed in Chapter Two, Shakespeare's use of Davis' concept poses a

further ethical issue by evoking the fact that the effort expended in ‘normalising’ itself constitutes a kind of performance, especially in the context of McRuer’s (2006) formulation of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’. If I wanted participants to have to do as little of that as possible in responding to research *about* performance, then my study’s environment and requirements needed to facilitate this. Disregarding my querying of Rowley’s description of interviews for the moment, and returning to the earlier discussion of their selection as the most feasible option for data collection, beyond the fair representation of participants’ contributions (Shakespeare 1997 249) which seemed so crucial in a study *about* representation, accessibility was the primary deciding factor. Of course accessibility is, as Shakespeare would likely attest, one of the key components of being fairly represented – hence his rejection of questionnaires as well as more formal kinds of interviews.

The choice of semi-structured interviews did not provide a complete solution to accessibility issues for me or my participants, for reasons which engage with every aspect of Rowley’s (2012 260) description of interviews as a broader category. Firstly, in order for them to take place ‘face-to-face’, the venue not only had to be neutral but allow physical and sensorial accessibility. Combined with the geographical sense of holding them in London, where much of the potentially interested demographic was based, this meant many of the usual places were very literally off-limits. What could have been a significant struggle was solved by my association with Warwick Business School through co-supervision, as I was granted regular access to their premises at the Shard, London Bridge. This venue functioned at once as an incentive and a reminder that our use of it was mandated by the fact that the perhaps more mundane spaces in our shared creative fields were fundamentally exclusionary to a project such as mine, where attendance was predicated on collective access. This is by no means an expression of ingratitude, but rather yet another articulation of the ways in which my experiences as a researcher, and those of my participants during our engagement with the project, matched the narratives they gave me in their contributions.

Secondly, with regards to the interviewer ‘acquir[ing] information from’ the interviewee, one of the most vital types of information is the informed consent to participate. This requirement presented the most frequent area of awkwardness for the participants but, rather than resulting from emotional discomfort, it was purely due to

the fact that my department has a single option for the consent form that is an uneditable PDF. We circumvented this conundrum either by scanning it for later completion or by substituting verbal consent at the beginning of recorded conversations. However, linking this to Rowley's characterisation of interviews as 'verbal exchanges' (2012 260), both these alternatives were problematic for participants who struggled either with speech or the physicality of writing, so sometimes electronic signatures were used. Moreover, recalling the earlier querying of the 'one person [and] another person' dynamic, in certain circumstances where typing proved equally difficult to writing, participants authorised *their* personal assistants to sign *per procurationem*. Of course this required additional confidentiality agreements. Similarly, ensuring accessibility for any D/deaf BSL user participants who wished to be interviewed in person required an awareness of available interpreters because, despite understanding BSL up to Level One, my left hand's limited mobility prevents proper communication of the kind required for interview. This is the one area of provision in which I would most like to have improved, as it restricted my engagement with this particular community. Alternatives were arranged (like email, discussed below) and there was significant *interest* in participation, but ultimately (in a slightly positive twist) the flourishing of these potential respondents' careers meant that they were too busy. Consequently there was only one Deaf participant, a producer, although I did also interview interpreters and other signing practitioners. Nevertheless, whilst (properly paid) interpreters are often difficult to arrange at short notice and particularly expensive on a small departmental stipend, such experiences once again correlate (in a negative way) with participants' frustrations about their careers, and I would have hoped to mitigate that.

Although the above difficulties illustrate that the choice of interviews (especially in Rowley's 'face-to-face verbal' formulation [2012 260]) over questionnaires or surveys did not entirely eradicate issues around accessibility, a wider comprehension of the definition did serve to lessen them considerably, because it enabled tailoring each stage, from setup to eventual conversation, so that they most suited the needs and preferences of each participant. Such a wider comprehension, and its implications, forms the remainder of this methodological discussion.

In seeking to trouble Rowley's (2012) description of interviews, it is also important to reference other definitions and claims about their nature. Some of these engage with different forms of interview, especially the usage of technology within them, and these conclude this chapter's discussion. More fundamental, though, are suggestions like that of Ribbens, who posits that 'interviews are generally an alien encounter for most interviewees' (1989 583). Whilst this might be correct, Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst qualify such generalisations, with the reminder that,

[a]lthough interviews are not a daily occurrence in most people's lives, many still tend to have a sense of how they might unfold – arrivals and introductions, the interviewer and participants getting "comfortable" with one another, questions and answers flowing in a conversational manner, thanks being offered and farewells exchanged (2017 151).

Moreover, when considered alongside Weller's (2017) extension of Goffman (1956), such questioning of the unfamiliarity of interviews becomes additionally pertinent in the case of my participants. Expanding Goffman's theatrical metaphor for everyday interaction discussed in Chapter Two, Weller states that 'the qualitative interview scenario is akin a theatrical production with scripts (questions and responses) and roles with the interviewer and participant each interpreting the script and presenting themselves accordingly' (2017 616). Along with Holt's observation that, 'when researching participants who are particularly marginalized and whose lives have already been subject to the "professional gaze" [...], the interview experience may not be dissimilar from other experiences where professionals have come into the participants' homes and asked a series of questions about their lives' (2010 115) Weller's formulation seemingly coheres with Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst (2017) to provide a direct counterpoint to Ribbens. Indeed, it leads me to propose that my interviewees, many of whom are both professional performers and disabled people (and thereby members of a group simultaneously accustomed to public and professional gazes, *pace* Holt [2010] and Hadley [2014]) were well equipped for the interview scenario. That said, here I acknowledge the potentially negative impact of reflexivity, as my visible impairment may have made some non-disabled participants reticent in interview for fear of causing offence. Interestingly, too, the majority of my non-disabled participants were not performers, but rather directors, producers or

casting directors, so perhaps less comfortable being the focus of a theatrical exchange, however simulated it might be.

The nuances of this methodological argument (which has a similar basis to my points about disability and precarity in work proposed in Chapter Two) are extrapolated on below with regards to technology and what Weller (after Rettie [2009]) terms 'mediated communication'. Firstly, however, I outline the ways in which technology was utilised to expand the possibility of interviews in my own study. As previously mentioned, I set up the interviews to be semi-structured, with a few guidance questions to begin, and then let each participant control the trajectory of the resulting discussion and asked supplementary questions as and when relevant. This meant that at times the interviews were characterised as unstructured rather than semi-structured, although I did keep to an interview schedule to ensure necessary topics were broached. In line with the access provision discussed earlier, prior to interviews, I sent out an alternative easy-read information sheet to facilitate the involvement of learning-disabled participants. Then, according to requirements or personal preferences for communication, interviews were conducted in one of four ways – in person at the Shard, via telephone, over Skype/FaceTime/Google Hangout, or via email correspondence.

The latter, which, as Rowley notes in her sole reference to methods beyond 'face-to-face verbal exchanges' (2012 260), 'may be preferred by some participants since they can provide the information at their leisure', is where 'the "interviewee" completes an interview schedule and sends it back by e-mail to the researcher' (2012 265). As well as the reduced time constraint mentioned by Rowley, and the access benefits for participants already discussed, this method had accessibility-related advantages for me as a researcher. Conducting email correspondence enabled me to be completely independent, as a result of the copy-and-paste feature in most word-processing software, since I was provided with readymade transcripts. However, because this format was similar to a structured interview, it also meant that the flow of participants' *thought* processes was much more prescribed than the spontaneous progress of in-person conversations. Consequently, although PA support was still a factor after conversations over the telephone or Skype/FaceTime/Google Hangout, these options were nevertheless preferable to email, and they are explored in much more detail here. This is in line with Moylan et al., who 'urge qualitative researchers to discuss and

describe their use of technological tools in their manuscripts and conference presentations so that others can learn about useful resources' (2015 46).

Holt argues that 'there is no need to consider the use of telephones for narrative interviewing as a "second-best" option: indeed, there may be sound ideological, methodological and practical reasons why it may be a more favourable mode than the often "default mode" of face-to-face interviewing' (2010 120), and Deakin and Wakefield make parallel points about Skype, stating that '[t]he online interview should be treated as a viable option to the researcher rather than as an alternative or secondary choice when face-to-face interviews cannot be achieved' (2014 604). Cognisant of their reminders that 'there are growing numbers of options for researchers conducting interviews, and multiple methods of interviewing are increasingly required to access the ideal research sample' (604), as well as that 'online interviews can be valuable for researchers who wish to contact participants who may otherwise be difficult to reach, such as the less physically mobile, socially isolated' (605), it seems important to preface this part of the discussion with the statement that, like Hanna, '[t]his choice was deemed important to the research process due to the ethical nature of the research subject' (2012 239), namely the prevalence of accessibility. Furthermore, since telephone and online interviews were chosen 'as a method to enable the individual to make choices regarding the research process without impacting on the "quality" of data produced' (2012 240), and '[r]ecruitment of interview participants was conducted in the same way for both the online and face-to-face interviews' (Deakin and Wakefield 2014 608), in this thesis I present all quotations equally, without reference to their source format.

Despite Tsatsou noting that, '[m]ore recently, Rogers (2013) separated digital methods from virtual methods [and] defined virtual methods as imported and migrated from offline research and as adapted to the online environment wherein they are employed (e.g., online surveys, e-interviews)' (2016 599), it is therefore reasonable to state that my focus here is on 'the relationship between digital tools and qualitative research and [the ways it] illustrates the entanglements that occur whenever humans intersect with the nonhuman, the human-made, or other humans' (Paulus et al. 2017 752). In this subset of my wider comprehension of interviews more generally, I follow Deakin and

Wakefield, who ask, 'how might online interviewing change the very sense of the interview as we traditionally know it?' (2014 607)

The most obvious distinguishing factor of Skype and FaceTime interviews is that, '[u]nlike telephone interviews, both the interviewer and participant can see each other during the interview while being in a different location' (Seitz 2015 230). This 'potential to mirror physical co-present conversations with two-way real-time communication comprising both audio and video elements', combined with the fact that they are 'both free and readily available' (Weller 2017 615), were key elements in making them an accessible alternative to traditional interviews. A third platform, Google Hangout, was used instead with one participant. Parallel across all these programmes, Weller states that a 'key concern for qualitative work is whether there are differences between the way the researcher and participant relate to, understand and trust one another in internet video interviews when compared to face-to-face physical co-present discussions' (2017 616). In relation to this, Seitz observes that 'there are some notable disadvantages for Skype qualitative interviews that need to be mitigated. These include dropped calls and pauses, inaudible segments, inability to read body language and nonverbal cues, and loss of intimacy compared to traditional in-person interviews' (2015 230).

Whilst acknowledging these issues, I would qualify Seitz's statement, especially her framing of these aspects as 'disadvantages' for Skype 'compared to traditional in-person interviews'. If they are in fact disadvantages, they are not specific to Skype, since, as Sullivan recalls, '[r]ecorders malfunction, batteries run out, researchers forget to hit record, computers won't start' (2012 59). Additionally, Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst go some way to contradicting their characterisation as disadvantages, suggesting that '[t]he bodies, spaces and objects engaged in Skype encounters appear both normative and non-normative' (2017 150). Alongside their interest in 'the ebb and flow of conversation and the *choreographies* of bodily interaction' (150, my emphasis) to foreground 'a tangle of connections that take place through and between bodies and objects that can be "felt" in a number of ways' (150), this description of Skype's atmosphere and affect is striking in the context of this thesis' subject. Recalling my earlier positioning of disabled performer participants as particularly well-equipped to navigate the theatrical nature of interview scenarios of any kind, this explicit suggestion

that Skype blurs the boundaries between ‘normative and non-normative’ bodies (with its echoes of Garland Thomson’s [1997] formulation of the ‘normate’ cited in Chapter Two) might add another digital dimension to this facility. If so, the claim that ‘[t]elecommunications such as Skype [...] reframe the notion of rapport and subsequent interactions between interviewer and participant’ (Deakin and Wakefield 2014 610), can be read as positive, and even productive.

Moreover, to return to Seitz’s articulation of the disadvantages of Skype in comparison to in-person interviews, especially her particular references to ‘inaudible segments, inability to read body language and nonverbal cues’ (2015 230), when considering a wide variety of impairment effects (Thomas 1999), it is plausible to posit that these are features of disabled people’s engagement with the world regardless of the environment or medium of interaction. For instance, as discussed in Chapters Four and Six, differing speech patterns, spasms and the presence of vocal or physical tics might be perceived as mitigating comprehension of body language or intent of expression, whether or not they actually have this effect. Such a suggestion is consistent with Weller’s reporting of ‘a sense of co-presence that transcended the actual physical locations of researcher and participant to a more emotional connection that was of importance in building and sustaining rapport’ (2017 618).

Shifting focus towards the telephone, which similarly transcends location, Holt observes that ‘the use of the telephone can also serve to silence other aspects which in turn may silence the potential for researcher–participant engagement with issues of privilege and power within the research setting’ (2010 116). The basis for this statement is the opposite of Seitz’s comment that Skype and similar platforms provide visual as well as audio feedback (2015 230). Holt rightly cautions that both differences and similarities between people cannot necessarily be discerned purely through verbal communication. However, she also notes that ‘it appears that resistance to the use of telephone interviews for the production of narrative is a particular research-specific practice: after all, life stories are often powerfully narrated through the radio and the use of telephones is assumed to be qualitatively beneficial in certain counselling practices’ (2010 119). Her assertion that ‘life stories are often powerfully narrated through the radio’ is particularly pertinent to this thesis, as it could be extended to encompass *all* stories, and the possibilities of radio for casting more equitably were raised anecdotally

on several occasions when I mentioned the subject of my study. In terms of further enquiry, this is another potential site for methodological expansion beyond TV and theatre. Here, however, the wider importance of the silencing capacity of the telephone arises from Holt's reference to some of her interviewees' 'preoccupation about how they *should* perform' (118), evident in phrases like 'I hope I wasn't banging on too much'. For Holt, '[s]uch comments suggest a participant anxiety about actively appropriating the discursive space that was offered to them, and perhaps illustrates the difficulty with purposely offering what Drewery (2005) terms "agentive position calls" to participants who are frequently excluded from such positions in their everyday interactions' (2010 118). As Holt herself notes, though, this tendency to check in 'may not be specific to the use of the telephone' – an opinion which correlates with my own participants' employment of similar language.

Connecting this with Holt's earlier evocation of the fact that marginalised participants might be more used to the professional gaze (2010 115), the paradox presented is similar to that posed by Hadley's (2014) positioning of disabled people as unconscious performers who somehow nevertheless seem restricted from agency in that performance, as discussed in Chapter Two (cf. Koppers 2017). It also raises a related issue, reminiscent of Goffman (1956), with regards to the concept of authenticity. Both these points provide further examples of methodology matching with pertinent aspects in analysis of the empirical data, as McGann's (2015) distinction between accuracy and authenticity (introduced in Chapter Two and elaborated on in Chapter Six's discussion of *Call the Midwife*) attests. In methodological terms, Sullivan observes that, '[a]s Peterson (2005) points out, authenticity is socially constructed and therefore changing all of the time. He continues: "Issues of authenticity most often come into play when authenticity has been put in doubt" (2005, p. 1083)' (2012 56). Moreover, following Peterson in emphasising the *everyday* nature of this social construction, Sullivan posits it as ubiquitous regardless of the medium, stating:

[t]he presentation of an authentic self or an accurate presentation of self are both difficult to gauge in both face-to-face and online interactions. [...] it is argued that using a communication program like Skype mimics face-to-face interactions, including the presentation of self in an authentic way, almost as well as those face-to-face exchanges. There is no sure way to judge [...] whether or not a

person is being truthful about the information they are sharing regardless of the method of data collection (2012 56).

With these repeatedly drawn out parallels between theory, method and empirical data in mind, alongside Roulston's imperative (after Baker) that we should 'examine the "versions of worlds" talked about by speakers (Baker, 2002: 778) [to] assist in examining the "culture in action" in a particular social setting' (2013 280), this methodology concludes by arguing that the representational metaphors with which methodological discussions of participatory research are riven may be considered additionally productive and useful when literalised in the context of research around performance work, particularly that specific to disability. Furthermore, cognisant of Given and Willson's acknowledgement that '[t]raditionally, humanities scholarship has involved researchers engaging with and reflecting on texts, broadly defined as that which can be "read," regardless of format (e.g., written, audio, visual)' (2018 808), it is plausible to position both the interview contributions, and the frameworks of shows in which they are situated for analysis, as equally and reciprocally able to be read – and assist in the reading of each other. This proposition propels the project forward into such scholar-activism as called for by Oscar Holmes IV (2019), since the remaining chapters echo his employment of a theatrical production to inform, educate and encourage change in both academic and sociological praxis and comprehension.

## Chapter Four

### **'What? Who? No! *She!*' – Touretteshero's *Not I* as a rallying cry for representation and a symbol of positive potential in theatre**

Following the theoretical perspectives and logistical practicalities set out in Chapters Two and Three, this fourth chapter begins analysing the findings of the study central to this thesis. Using the strategy outlined in Chapter Three, it positions empirical data from interviews within the framework of a particular production. The chapter explores the possibilities for disability representation and recruitment found through reclaiming and adapting existing plays – particularly the so-called dramatic canon. However, as will be shown, the nature of this particular production, and the surrounding cultural conversations, situates it as somehow simultaneously 'radical' and 'mainstream'. The production in question is a version of Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972) by the artist and activist Jess Thom (P), otherwise known as Touretteshero (Battersea Arts Centre 2017, 2018). As mentioned in Chapter One, *Not I*'s placement as the first empirical analysis is therefore deliberate. Its smaller-scale incarnation (which I watched twice, first in preview for the Edinburgh Fringe and then in a fuller run following its return to London) makes it an interesting prism through which to explore the positive potential of disability and impairment in theatre that many of my participants were keen to foreground. It acts as a gentle buffer before Chapter Five focuses on some of the more difficult aspects of the industry alongside the scope of a bigger production. It also provides an opposite example to Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) concept of 'narrative prosthesis' discussed in Chapter Two, where impairment is represented a mere metaphor, by instead connecting a dramatic representation of impairment directly and literally to the lived experience of a performer. Along with a discussion of positive practice, it thereby allows an exploration of the original impetus for my research – questions about who gets to tell certain stories and what constitutes representation. The chapter begins by situating the production in the context of Beckett's relationship to disability more generally. It then moves to explore the specificity of figuring *Not I*'s 'Mouth' as neurodiverse, before examining access possibilities afforded by the presence of 'Auditor'. Finally, it offers a potential map into the future of opportunities for representation and recruitment alongside disability and impairment.

Due to the nature of the piece under analysis, the text by itself (a roughly twelve minute monologue consisting of the stream-of-consciousness of the disembodied 'Mouth', witnessed by the silent presence of 'Auditor') offers up fewer specific moments of representation. Yet this is its primary interest for the thesis. The juxtaposition of this apparent absence of representation and the strength of Jess Thom's (P) identification with the piece is striking. Consequently, the chapter's structure uses significant quotations from the monologue to examine the more general artistic and aesthetic principles behind this particular production. In so doing, it interrogates the significance of Jess Thom/Touretteshero finding a narrative for herself in the form of a character who, as Enoch Brater (1974) suggests, 'is compulsive in its [sic] stubborn refusal to abandon the security of the third-person singular' (191).

*'Whole body like gone' – some background on Beckett in relation to disability*

My early citation of Brater (1974) illustrates another difference in this chapter – the amount of academic literature available to supplement analysis. Whilst both *Wicked* and *Call the Midwife* have thus far garnered relatively little scholarly attention, the same is not true of Beckett. Indeed, he may be positioned as a cornerstone of the critical canon as much as the dramatic one. It might therefore be supposed that the short script under examination would be balanced out by the potential references to academic material. On the surface, this is so. However, despite the presence of disabled bodies (with specifically scripted impairments) across his work, there is minimal discussion of the real and practical significance of these bodies being represented on stage. The sole exception is found in Ato Quayson (2007). As outlined in Chapter Two, Quayson's concept of 'aesthetic nervousness' related to disability and impairment has significance across the whole thesis. Yet his work bears most relevance here because he, too, uses Beckett as an example. Quayson observes that 'it is very rare that his impaired characters are read as disabled, even though their disabilities are blatant and should be impossible to ignore. Rather, the characters are routinely assimilated by critics to philosophical categories and read off as such' (2007 28). He further suggests that '[d]isability in Beckett is represented predominantly via the mode of hermeneutical

conundrum, not so much so as to raise doubt about what it might mean, but so that the entire apparatus of representation is riddled with gaps and aporia' (84).

The latter point is perhaps a slightly altered iteration of Hadley's (2014) concept of the continuous performance, and performativity, of visibly disabled people, situated in Chapter Two as fundamental to this project. However, Quayson's (2007) argument might also be considered oppositional to Hadley's – if impairment is difficult to 'read', its possibility as a vehicle for representation could be curtailed. This recalls Koppers' (2017) equally foundational perspective, that this quotidian performativity is the very feature which precludes our *active* participation in performance (77-78). Moreover, such a conundrum was explicitly invoked in an employment context by Jamie Beddard (P, W, D), who discussed audiences' responses to his body's onstage presence (having Cerebral Palsy):

for the first ten minutes I was on stage you could really feel, oh my god what's he doing there? But after ten minutes they come on your journey and you become Jamie the actor rather than Jamie the disabled bloke. Do you know what I mean? I love that moment when the audience forget about their preconceptions and go yeah, this bloke may or may not be a good actor.

This quotation, conveniently in reference to a production of another Beckett play (the 'Tottering Bipeds' 1996 *Waiting for Godot*), arguably dispels the second potential reading of Quayson's (2007) suggested function for disability in Beckett. If disability itself emphasises 'gaps' in representation, the possibility of such emphasis would be undercut by its physical absence onstage. In the first instance, Jamie's comments articulate a desire for his impairment not to be the primary focus of audiences' attention, referencing his awareness of the actor's function as group representative. This sense, consistent with both the 'formal' and 'informal' aspects of Dean's (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b) 'proxy' thesis, is often heightened when they belong to historic minorities (cf. Graver 1997 228-229). Its pervasiveness is bolstered by the frequent use of terms like 'the burden of representation' by many of my disabled interviewees, but was articulated effectively by Jamie:

The other thing I always say about my acting, I've never had a bad review in my life and I've been in a lot of rubbish. I've been not very good but people don't

review you in a normal way. I'll only feel I've made it when I get a bad review because I've been in a lot of shit, you know what I mean? I'm trying to get a bad review.

These comments might also point to Jamie's understanding of another of Graver's (1997) concepts, of the actor's 'working' or 'fleshly' body, the one that sweats, cries, or clicks (230-231), which is expanded through connection to Hadley's (2014) foregrounding of the continuous performance of visible impairment. Indeed, I was initially most struck by Jamie's phrasing, which seemed almost to negate his disabled identity. He 'loved that moment' he became 'the actor *rather than* the disabled bloke'. Such an apparent dichotomy was fascinating in my reflexive capacity as researcher. As a fellow performer with Cerebral Palsy, what *I* loved (watching Jamie more recently in *The Threepenny Opera* [2016, National Theatre, Olivier]) was the obvious combination of the two – the chance to witness a disabled performer onstage. Nevertheless, on further examination, the transformative moment Jamie mentions may not negate his impairment but actually only be possible *because* of it. This would cohere with a third reading of Quayson (2007), and one which is bolstered by the author himself, when he states:

[d]isability teases us out of thought, to echo Keats, not because it resists representation, but because in being represented it automatically restores an ethical core to the literary-aesthetic domain while also invoking the boundary between the real and the metaphysical or otherworldly. (22)

Such linguistic emphasis on both ethics and metaphysics both links to Chapter One's discussion of the meanings behind different kinds of representation and the role of theatre in society, and is of course extremely apposite within the realms of Beckettian drama. However, before discussing Beckett specifically in relation to Touretteshero's *Not I*, Jamie's earlier expression of his mission to 'get a bad review' invokes a wider issue surrounding expectations of disabled performers' disability representation. This was foregrounded by Rachel Denning (P). As one of my few disabled participants who went to Drama School, she said of the beginnings of her career:

I could not fault my training, I had a great three years. I was pushed in every way that I could/should have been. What was interesting was that, it was *me* who put

in boundaries when it came to castings at drama school - for example, I would question why I was being cast as a leading lady or a love interest with no comment being made about my height or disability. My tutor would reply to me saying, "when you leave here, the industry is going to try and pigeonhole you enough – we are not going to do that here – we are going to give you roles that challenge you and that support your training".

Rachel's interaction with her tutor, along with the perspective of Nadia Albina (P) upcoming in Chapter Four, illustrates that it is not merely audiences who have preconceptions but performers too. This is consistent with Dean's (2008a) observation of performers' self-selection or deselection from auditions, regardless of impairment, due to 'shared perceptions of social qualifications' (175). However, in the particular case of disability, these perceptions likely arise from a combination of internalised ableism and a lack of role models to counteract them. This pairing is interrogated in the next section, in the context of Touretteshero's *Not I*.

*'Sudden urge to tell' – Figuring the character of Mouth as neurodiverse*

The previous section ends with the experience of a disabled performer who took the 'traditional' route into the industry – but this chapter in particular is concerned with questioning theatrical and training conventions. It charts the trajectory of an artist and activist who had no initial desire or plan to perform professionally at all. For Jess Thom (P), even attending the theatre as an audience member could be a fraught and often traumatic experience. Early in our interview, she spoke of how:

I increasingly found accessing live performance, accessing theatre, accessing comedy, accessing spaces where there are particular rules or expectations, I found that increasingly hard, biscuit, as my tics made me stand out, biscuit. [...] I'd had loads of conversations and really weighed up in my own mind that my right to see stuff over other people's right not to be interrupted and I wasn't confident in my right to be in public spaces and particularly to be in theatrical and performance spaces.

Jess' experiences are striking in that they belie the inherent problems in the binary split frequently set up between disabled audiences and performers in terms of available

access provision (cf. Hadley 2015; Koppers 2017). They also question what the options are for participation when traditional routes and areas are, by their very nature, inaccessible and exclusionary. For Jess, the answer was simple, although not without its challenges to enact: 'I decided to occupy the only seat in the house I wouldn't be asked to leave – the stage.'

She did so by co-founding Touretteshero with Matthew Pountney in 2010. This organisation celebrates disability arts and campaigns for social justice to share the creativity and humour of Tourette's in an accessible way. It promotes artistic endeavour and activism through workshops, performance and an interactive website ([www.touretteshero.com](http://www.touretteshero.com)). Under Touretteshero, Jess and Matthew were awarded a Wellcome Engagement Fellowship (cf. Wellcome Grants Awarded 2016) and have used this to facilitate collaboration between artists, activists and academics at relaxed conferences (cf. Liddiard 2018). Alongside performing *Not I*, they also created a companion documentary, as part of which our interview for this thesis was filmed (*Touretteshero: Me, My Mouth and I* [BBC 2018]).

That Jess' struggle to find and forge a space she felt safe enough to participate in led directly to her creative career is an important note about employment on its own – sometimes performance is the only possibility. This is a further take on Hadley's (2014) observation of 'unconscious performance' but it is also a powerful example of what happens when that performance is allowed to become conscious and creative. Indeed, Jess herself used similar phrases when discussing the beginnings of the Touretteshero mission, explaining how Matthew

described Tourette's as a crazy language-generating machine and told me that not doing something creative, biscuit, would be wasteful, biscuit. And I really heard that sentence, that phrase, in a totally different way. We'd talked about Tourette's loads of times before and we'd talked about my experiences loads of times before and I know that he'd even talked about the creative potential of that before and I'd never heard it. I'd always been quite closed to that, I hadn't seen the value, biscuit, of my experiences or the spontaneous, you know, creativity that Tourette's gives me access to, I hadn't recognised that until I heard that sentence and somehow it got into my brain in a totally different way

Her choice of words in that final sentence – ‘somehow it got into my brain in a totally different way’ – has literal significance alongside her interest in the neurological basis of Tourette’s. It also has metaphorical resonance in that it details a moment of epiphany as a result of conversation. This recalls the philosophy of Levinas (1979), outlined in Chapter Two. Levinas seeks to ‘present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality’ (1979 27). Here, the significance of this is in the possibilities for *recognition* of Self and Other, which he contends are offered by communication, and specifically speech:

[t]o recognize the Other is therefore to come to him [sic] across the world of possessed things, but at the same time to establish, by gift, community and universality. Language is universal because it is the very passage from the individual to the general, because it offers things which are mine to the Other. (1979 76)

The implications of this focus on speech within the context of fictional drama, and especially a Beckettian drama which is literally (through lighting and other stagecraft) centred on the mouth are manifold. They also bear more general relevance to Jess Thom’s (P) decision to perform. Her initial epiphany in conversation with Matthew led not only to the founding of Touretteshero but to the creation of an autobiographical piece exploring, in part, what it means to access theatre as a neurodiverse person. Titled *Backstage in Biscuit Land* (2015) in humorous reference to one of her most prominent tics (‘biscuit’), the show featured Jess and fellow performer/creative assistant Jess Mabel Jones, as well as a puppet of Touretteshero, her new activist-superhero alter ego. Whilst the narrative of that production was and is interesting in its own right, its primary pertinence to the discussion relates to two practical elements of its performance and presentation. The first, as Jess put it, was ‘how do we make a piece of theatre where there’s a sort of script and a predictability of storytelling when my body and mind are neurologically incapable of staying on script’. This is a point which carries through to her work with Beckett but even here it highlights the necessity for creativity and collaboration in the context of disability and impairment. It underscores a theme from my interviews where practitioner participants (both disabled and non-disabled) sought to emphasise the ‘potential’ they perceived in such situations. The second practical element arose during the tour process:

*Backstage in Biscuit Land* sort of promotes the idea of relaxed performances and performances that extend a warm invitation to people with different types of body and mind and people who might not be able to follow the usual conventions of theatre etiquette. One of the things that came up a lot was venues saying, “oh we’re really interested in relaxed performance” or, biscuit, “we really want to make our work accessible to disabled people but we haven’t had the right type of show yet”. So, I got really curious about this cultural curation that happened around what work is and isn’t suitable for disabled people.

The notion of ‘suitability’ adds another layer to the dynamics around disability and theatre. The concept may relate to the fact that historically (as noted in Chapter Two) the prominent mode of engagement with theatre available to disabled people was through drama therapy. Moreover, it points to a further reason for the employment barrier. If there are only certain types of theatre deemed suitable for us, not to mention roles, then the pool of possibility decreases dramatically. This in turn affects the opportunity for representation, which then perpetuates the sense of exclusion. Within the context of this chapter such a notion is equally charged in both the fictional and non-fictional realms. For Beckett, and the myriad scholars who study him, ‘suitability’ and its implications seem paramount. As Wilma Siccama (1999) phrases it, ‘[t]ime and again, we read that Beckett wanted his work on stage to be exactly as he had envisioned it; that the text played a crucial part; and that the stage directions had to be respected’ (181). Siccama raises this precisely in order to challenge it. She argues that Beckett’s preference for working in translation already distances the centrality of his word as author, as does the very nature of drama in performance. This line of enquiry is pursued further throughout this chapter, alongside its potential implications for performance, employment and representation, as well as the wider perception of canonical texts. Rather than being founded on frustration, though, such exploration is inspired by the ‘playfulness’ Jess Thom (P) has found through her realisation that ‘one of the big partnerships within [her] practice as an artist is with [her] own brain’. This attitude is simultaneously an example of managing ‘impairment effects’ (Thomas 1999; Foster and Williams 2014) and of a slightly different iteration of Foster and Scott’s (2015) concept of ‘disability precarity’ in the workplace. It illustrates very specifically and literally what Jess termed the ‘risks to that’ kind of collaboration. In her words, ‘not knowing what

you're going to say is a particularly terrifying thing on stage', but it also made her wonder about possibilities for future theatrical investigation. It might even be held to have directly dictated the choice of the next production, since, in the time when her tics were proving most difficult to cope with, Matthew introduced her to *Not I*. He was

really fascinated by the relationship between that text and my experiences of automatic speech. He was really curious about what would happen if my tics heard *Not I* and whether they would be triggered or whether I would, whether they would send me off on my own stream of language.

This was the point in our interview where the difference between drama-as-text and drama-as-performance became both clear and crucial, especially in terms of representation. Having watched recordings of previous productions, the resonance wasn't quite there for Jess. She was frank: 'I did not recognise Mouth as a disabled character from Billie Whitelaw's performance or from any of the other ones I have ever seen but from the text I really, really did'. Such a distinction is striking in relation to Ato Quayson's (2007) comments discussed earlier. *Not I* is not one of the examples of disability in Beckett he offers. In conjunction with Jess' perspective, this illustrates how *easily* the 'reading-over' of impairment might occur. Additionally, this returns to Siccama's (1999) observation of the strictures supposedly surrounding performance of Beckett. Jess found no connection in her initial, non-textual, engagements with Mouth (in spite of Matthew's excitement and interest). Nevertheless, she said:

*Not I* has remained a reference for Touretteshero for many, many years. It came up over and over again in our conversations long before we were actually making shows, we would talk about Mouth, and so when we, I was having a meeting and we were talking about classic texts with another theatre company and, we, they were asking me about whether I would be interested in performing a role in another very sort of classic text and we mentioned *Not I* and someone around the table said I'd never get permission to perform *Not I* and that really intrigued us and along with the sort of cultural curation we were experiencing from venues we were really then interested in who has control and who gets permission to perform what roles.

It was this combined impetus which made her wonder more about the significance of *Not I* and *Mouth*, so she re-engaged with it through the text:

it was when I read it that I felt so deeply connected to that character, so much of what was in that text really resonated with my experience as someone with Tourette's. There were actually bits that made me laugh out loud because I couldn't quite believe how, like, it's like I know her, I know, I felt so strongly that I knew what that meant. There were about 20 or 30 lines in that play that I felt I could instantly talk about, "whole body like gone", "mouth on fire", "stream of words" "sudden urge to tell", so many of these things spoke to me [...] it felt amazing to me that, that, that, a seemingly non-disabled, dead writer, years before I was born had written something that really spoke to my experience and I felt an urgent need to tell that, to be part of that, to be part of presenting that story and to getting people to connect with *Mouth* in a different way

This section of our conversation felt like another stage of her earlier epiphany around the creativity afforded by Tourette's. It also echoed the relief of other performer participants upon discovering moments of representation. For instance, Ben Wilson (P) said his experience of what he termed 'sight-loss' was 'hugely impacted by the examples and stories' he had previously encountered about it – so much so that he 'thought [his] career was over'. Yet his reaction changed when he came into contact with companies like Extant, the UK's leading company of and for visually-impaired practitioners, and he now considers his visual impairment to be the 'best thing' for his career. Such a shift is revisited in Chapter Five alongside other participants' acquaintances with Graeae. It also underscores a further important theme – responsibility. This is relevant with reference to Jess' identification of Beckett as a 'seemingly non-disabled, dead writer' because this description raises the issue of whose responsibility (and indeed right) it is to tell certain stories. As well as its methodological implications discussed in Chapter Three, it was one of the questions posed to all participants (albeit altered to fit their practice). The most pertinent response here is that of (non-disabled) screenwriter Olivia Hetreed (W), who has told a range of diverse and inclusive stories throughout her career. Whilst aware of the limits of her own experience and identity, she was also conscious of the certain professional sway she holds, and the need to use that productively:

a constant pleasure about the job that I do is that I get to do research all the time, and I really like to do that, almost to a fault that I will go off and do research rather than getting on with it [writing]. So if I'm looking at a part of life that I don't know anything about that, for me is an opportunity to go and find out about it

Moreover, speaking about writing as a practice rather than the specifics of her process, she continued:

One of the fundamental rules is about being empathetic, trying to really think carefully about what you're doing and being properly respectful of other people's experience, because the opportunity I have is to put someone else's experience in front of a wider audience and give everybody else the opportunity to be empathetic as well.

Olivia's response interested me on a number of levels. Although many of my *disabled* participants had articulated a desire to tell their own stories, they were also frustrated at the *expectation* they would. Sam McFarland (W), a screenwriter with a foreshortened arm, actively *resisted* telling disability-related stories – at least during film school, in a similar manner to Nadia Albina (P), who shares his impairment and whose experience of drama training features in Chapter Five. More like that of Rachel Denning (P) discussed above, though, interaction with a particular tutor shifted Sam's perspective. He said this tutor

really forced you to, make uncomfortable stuff [...] So my go-to was stuff on my arm [...] Um, it helped me a lot sort of break down stigmas that I didn't even realise I had, where like things where you're not even considering how *you* are presenting *yourself* to make other people feel differently. Um, so I think that – that – that course really helped me a lot to sort of break down some walls that I didn't even know were there.

Whilst Sam was very open about the significance of this particular project, he nevertheless remained clear that his focus in writing was wider, because otherwise he 'would only be telling stories of a white, middle class American, 26-year-old film maker with one arm'.

This supposedly very specific perspective was also raised as an employment issue by Jamie Beddard (P, W, D):

generally my disability is my overriding feature in terms of casting. Obviously, I'm a lot more complex than that, I'm white, middle-class, heterosexual, live in London and I happen to be disabled, I'm really interested in identity but in terms of casting, disability becomes the overriding feature, do you know what I mean? And that's really annoying, I've done a lot of work to change that, the work I do, the work I've made. If the only thing I am is my impairment, I'm not very interesting.

As well as acknowledging the privilege inherent in certain aspects of individual identities, such comments could be framed as highlighting nuance rather than specificity. Moreover, it suggests that nuance is often glossed over in many assessments of 'suitability' for job roles. This is especially true in performance work, due to the prominence of 'types' (cf. Dean 2005, 2008a). This was raised by Coralie Rose (P, CD), who moved from her initial career in performance to jobs in casting. She spoke of her working realities in performance as a mixed-race woman, and how she now realises that these influenced her transition to casting:

I mentioned before, my insecurities and I have a few but, I realise now they do come from that, a lack of grounded identity and feeling of other at school and lots of different places. I think the reason I went into casting, and I say it quite a lot, when I was growing up, "there are no families that look like mine on TV and so I have no sort of role model", you know other women that look like my mum or my dad or other people I could identify with on TV or media and that's something that I feel I can have an effect on or that I could change but it was quite a subtle thing. I didn't know that not everyone else felt this way and I think it's quite subtle because I present as, you know, white or Caucasian British

This discussion of nuance around identity in general relates back to Jess Thom's (P) comments on *Beckett's* background, and especially her surprise at his deep understanding of an experience so different from his own. It emphasises the possibilities of empathy raised earlier by Olivia Hetreed (W). However, with reference to Coralie's comments about the complications of "passing" as a more privileged racial

identity (cf. Khanna and Johnson 2010), there may be another layer (and consequently perspective) to consider in connection to impairment, too. With reference to Beckett's physicality, Ato Quayson (2007) states:

Pertinent to the discussion of Beckett's work is that he himself suffered endless illnesses ranging from an arrhythmic heartbeat and night sweats to cysts and abscesses on his fingers, the palm of his left hand, the top of his palate, his scrotum and, most painfully later in life, his left lung. Often these cysts and abscesses had to be lanced or operated upon, leading to great and regular discomfort. It is not for nothing then that the deteriorating and impaired body held a special fascination for him. (29)

This positioning of Beckett's experiences of 'great and regular discomfort' as an impetus for the stories he elected to tell is extremely pertinent to the idea of responsibility around representation. It shows that Jess' description above, of Beckett as 'seemingly non-disabled', contains a crucial modifier. With knowledge of *his* experience, the discovery that he 'had written something that really spoke to [her] experience' might not have been such a surprise. Whilst cognisant of Mounsey's (2014) cautions against retroactively ascribing disabled identities, such an identification of impairment is consistent with his concept of variability. Moreover, it underscores what becomes possible when characters are considered through a frame of disability and that not only the texts but the *writers* of the dramatic canon may offer more representation than is initially supposed or understood.

This is interesting alongside earlier observations, both about Beckett's attitude towards changes (and that of his Estate), and the fact that Quayson (2007) does not include *Not I* in his list of plays concerning impairment. The first point was raised indirectly by an anonymous casting interviewee, evaluating the challenges and possibilities offered by the so-called canon and new writing. Having acknowledged that '[t]here's freedom in both, and I don't think either of those has an excuse to not do it, to cast diversely', they then said, 'that's the liberating thing about the canon, "the canon", you can do whatever you want with it, because for example with Shakespeare, you can do absolutely whatever you want and it usually works', whereas, if 'the writers are alive, they can have an opinion'. Beckett does not properly adhere to either category since, as Jess Thom (P) noted, he is a 'dead writer, [who] years before I was born, had written

something' incredibly resonant, but the presence of his Estate means he can still 'have an opinion' of a sort. However, as is evident from the success and reach of Jess' version of *Not I*, the Estate was amenable to adaptations. This supports a further statement from the same anonymous interviewee, who said (albeit about current writers), 'if you can get in early enough and say, by the way, we're thinking like this now', it affords multiple possibilities for non-traditional casting.

Such concepts link usefully to the second point above, about Quayson's (2007) omission of *Not I* as a play relating to disability. Despite the widespread neglect of disability within Beckett criticism, one brief connection could be made through Enoch Brater (1974), the first Beckett theorist mentioned in this chapter. For Brater, 'Beckett's Mouth, that "God-forsaken hole" hysterically speeding up momentum behind Dr. Johnson's swift determination of "beating the track of the alphabet with sluggish resolution," tells a story' (190). The relationship to disability is an elusive one which may not be immediately discernible, either to readers of this thesis or to Brater himself, writing in 1974. Nevertheless it is there – through the reference to Samuel Johnson, whose 'unusual' body has been the subject of fascinated speculation and scholarship since his autopsy. The connection between the authors is not novel (indeed it is the mainstay of much Beckett scholarship [cf. Bair 1978, Kelly in Pilling and Bryden 1992, Smith 2002]) but connecting them through shared lived experience of impairment is. Much like Quayson's (2007) late work on Beckett, the impact of such a body on Johnson's writing (especially as a productive and inspiring force) was not investigated until the work of Helen Deutsch (2005). Deutsch makes a case for a 'connection between embodiment and style' (loc.716) and 'reflects on the ways in which Johnson's physical particularity turned authorship into a performance, an ambiguous enactment of agency by a body in motion that made monstrosity exemplary' (loc.993). She proposes that he 'still endures not despite, but because of' what she terms 'his bodily failings' (loc.942). That these symptoms have been retrospectively diagnosed as Tourette's Syndrome (cf. Murray 1979, Stern et al. 2005) is the thread which leads most directly back to Beckett, via Brater's (1974) association of Mouth's monologue in its textual form with the work of Johnson, by positioning it as analogous to tics. This in turn leads back to Jess Thom's (P) epiphany in reading it, and her subsequent production aiming to reclaim the role. For her, it offers an example of the way embodiment may be incorporated into the social

model. It thereby provides an important opportunity for representation and employment within the theatrical art form requiring acknowledgement of both social and embodied perspectives. Referencing the convention of ‘cripping up’, Jess said

[t]hat’s where I think the social model and embodiment is really interesting because I think disabled people will naturally bring their lived experience to roles that they undertake and you will get a broader reflection than just mimicry and if we continue to tolerate non-disabled people leading the storytelling both as writers and performers we’re not going to see accurate representation of disability however good they are at twisting their bodies up and slurring their speech, biscuit.

This comment brings two pertinent points to the discussion. The first is that, following the discussion of different models in Chapter Two, here a social model reading would suggest that the presence of *disability* on stage is more than the presence of *impairment*, especially when mimicked. This observation is expanded in Chapter Five and the discomfort expressed around *Wicked* and Nessarose’s eventual ‘cure’. The second is that, despite this distinction, in line with Dean’s (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b) formal and informal proxy thesis, the industry as a whole, and society by extension, still seems more comfortable with this portrayal than with the platforming of those with lived experience. The latter of the two explains the disjunction between Jess Thom’s (P) perception of Mouth through watching or reading the play. It also returns to the central claim of Ato Quayson’s (2007) critical analysis – that the impairments of Beckett’s characters have previously been read as figurative rather than literal. Quayson does not address *Not I* in reference to this habit of scholarship. However, his argument could be extended to readings of Mouth, such as the feminist perspective of Mary Catanzaro (1990). In her study of the dynamic between subjectivity and objectivity in the text, centred on concepts of gaze and selfhood, Catanzaro both elevates Mouth to be a proxy for ‘woman’ and uses her disrupted monologue as metaphor in a manner reminiscent of Mitchell and Snyder’s (2001) narrative prosthesis. Catanzaro (1990) suggests that ‘[t]he paradox of woman’s position with others is that her place is in fact defined in the scattered, spastic [sic] voice of the text’ (36).

Such wording is strongly evocative of another ‘proxy’ thesis, that of Dean, and especially the ‘systemic ways that women’s position in wider society both shadows and structures the working realities of [...] performers’ (2008a 163). In line with this, the interesting aspect of Catanzaro’s (1990) suggestion is that questions concerning gaze and selfhood are equally central to Jess Thom’s (P) identification with, and of, Mouth as a *disabled* character. Moreover, this arose not merely from their shared physical experience, but the emotional and social ones, too. Jess said:

Mouth’s experience of gaze and of other people looking at her, it wasn’t just about impairment either, Mouth as a character was talking about streams of language that she couldn’t control, or she was talking about not being able to move her body or make a noise, all of those things were things I could physically relate to but I could also relate to her experience of exclusion and her experience of her community looking at her or her worry and her concerns, her worries about other people’s gaze and her changing her behaviour in order to, in response to her perceptions of what other people were thinking.

These various layers of connection with the character raise another of Catanzaro’s (1990) propositions. She suggests that ‘[t]he voice points out what is before the scene of Mouth’s inner gaze rather than what is visible to her senses. In other words, the voice relates to what is inside the subject all the while’ (36). On one level, this is a correct assessment, because there is nothing discernible with her on stage in terms of props. On another, however, the story she tells relates to memory of actual events in which she participated and so at least recalls past sensory engagement. Moreover, the interjections which form the overall title of this chapter (‘What? Who? No! She!’) signify that lack of interaction with either props or set is compensated by exclamations to Auditor – a silent, hooded figure positioned stage left and ‘fully faintly lit’ throughout. This distinction is perhaps more immediately obvious in the Touretteshero production – and the particular significance of this character is the focus of the next section.

*‘[G]esture[s] of helpless compassion’? – Auditor as a powerful symbol of accessibility*

In Touretteshero’s *Not I*, the many necessary adjustments and accommodations for access (both for Jess Thom (P) as a performer and for audience members) mean that the link to and presence of Auditor is more prevalent, and that the artifice of the stage setup

generally is more deliberately emphasised. These aspects include the relaxed performance environment and British Sign Language interpretation (where the role of the interpreter-performer, Charmaine Wombwell, is incorporated as the figure of Auditor). There was also an informal prologue and epilogue to the main piece, in the form of dramatic exercises for the audience, and a short contextualising documentary about the inspiration, influences and issues in the creative process. However, before exploring these aspects, it is important and interesting to note that analysis of Mouth's engagement with Auditor, and how this impacts her perspective, has been a feature since the play's premiere. For instance Brater (1974) asks readers to

consider for a moment the pronoun in its title not as pronoun, but as Roman numeral: for the visual images exposed before us on stage are not I, but II. Standing on a podium four feet above stage level, thus making a figure about ten feet tall, Auditor looms large, a height considerably elevated in the original New York production by the lighting of the scene to exaggerate verticalization. The extreme contrast between figures I (Mouth) and II (Auditor) is, therefore, not so much thematic and symbolic as it is visual. The tension between figures I and II creates an extraordinarily rudimentary movement for the audience: as Auditor makes the four movements of raising its arms specified in the script, we shift our eyes from them back to I again, focusing from smaller to larger image then smaller image again. The refocusing is essential, for if we concentrate too steadily on Mouth, we begin to discern in the stage darkness the actress behind the Mouth. By focusing and refocusing at least four times during the course of the play, the audience's attention is absorbed exclusively with images I and II with no interference of extraneous commodities like face or body to interrupt the stark antagonism between Mouth and Auditor, shadowy figure fully but faintly lit (195)

The pertinence of Brater's analysis here, and especially his assertion that '[t]he extreme contrast between figures I (Mouth) and II (Auditor) is, therefore, not so much thematic and symbolic as it is visual', is that it suggests the contrast is responsible for the very practical maintenance of the theatrical illusion. In highlighting that '[t]he tension between figures I and II creates an extraordinarily rudimentary movement for the audience: as Auditor makes the four movements of raising its arms specified in the

script, we shift our eyes from them back to I again, focusing from smaller to larger image then smaller image again', Brater proposes that such shifting is essential to our understanding of and connection with Mouth's very literal physical isolation. This is particularly noteworthy within the context of Jess Thom's (P) production, where Auditor is also the BSL interpreter, since the necessity of the shift in focus becomes even more striking; and indeed paramount for D/deaf audience members. Moreover, Brater's (1974) framing of the movement as positive, even integral, poses another possibility. In this modern production, it allows for the creative potential of what was outlined in Chapter One as 'the aesthetics of access', after the work of Jenny Sealey and Graeae. This approach was articulated by Jodi-Alissa Bickerton (P, D), Graeae's Creative Learning Director:

it spans the principles of how we work inclusively, how we make sure that people's access requirements are met, how we gather that information in advance, how we build the support in the room whether that is a workshop or rehearsal process, so making sure that people, even if they're not sure what they need, in any given moment that there is support there should it be needed. So it's looking at access workers, communication support workers, British sign language interpreters, our palantypists [captioners], and then I guess when you are looking towards a more polished product, how we make sure that audiences can access our shows as well, so using creative captioning, performance interpreters, embedding any access workers required on stage to be creatively embedded, so it's about that creative embedding of access support, both for the performers but also the audience members or workshop participants.

Similarly, in Touretteshero's *Not I*, through the employment of the BSL interpreter-performer as this very particular character (Auditor), an aspect of the accessibility support, often considered extraneous, actually enhances the illusion of the production. Such a point is especially pertinent to this production because the BSL interpretation involves more than a direct translation of Beckett's text. It needs to incorporate Jess Thom's (P) tics. As a result, even in the moments of silence suggested in the stage directions (usually by 'Pause' or 'Listen') might require interpretation. Indeed, in interview, Jess commented on how these moments often seem to be *filled* with her tics, whereas they are much less present throughout the spoken sections of the monologue.

This emphasises again the creative potential of impairment, and the possibility for expression to be found in representation. The ‘silence’ being filled with tics might illustrate Mouth’s unconscious desire to take up well-deserved space after hiding for so long in lavatories, despite her overt insistence that the story she tells is not her own.

It is also relevant to the financial considerations around disability and accessibility examined in Chapter Two. Integration of such support as BSL or relaxed environments into productions simultaneously mandates its integration into budgets; securing provision for performers and audiences alike. The combination of these two aspects links to an observation made by Becky Barry (P-I). Becky, like Jess’ colleague Charmaine in *Not I*, is a performer and interpreter. She said, ‘I think there’s a really interesting thing to do with tempo of communication in theatre, whether that’s in a rehearsal or whether that’s on the stage’. She acknowledged significant progress over the course of her career, regarding both wider presence and employment opportunities, for people she termed ‘our D/deaf and disabled colleagues’. She nevertheless felt that the industry’s infrastructure still requires a fundamental shift. This returns the discussion of the chapter to the question and concept of responsibility. Rather than ‘one D/deaf and disabled colleague being in a room and having to take responsibility’, for Becky it ought to be more about the other people in the process thinking of

“boring” stuff like “Okay, brilliant, I know I’m gonna work with a Deaf actor in four, five months’ time – I need to support them, or I need to at least say, what’s the deal with your Access to Work budget, can we book those interpreters now? What do we as a room need to do? Oh okay, so if I do, if we do six hours of roundtable text work, that’s not very accessible for you? Okay, we won’t do that, we’ll do one hour a day.” ‘Cause actually I think recognising that, for *anybody*, six hours of roundtable text work, by about hour four, no-one is listening any more.

Becky’s opinions address both the financial implications of an inclusive process and the creative potential, but she adds another layer by proposing that adjustments for accessibility could actually benefit every member of a company or ensemble. Her latter suggestion evokes the ethos of shows like *Not I*, and their decisions to make every performance relaxed. It transforms the accessibility of the space as a whole and has the potential to provide a more fulfilling experience for all involved. This idea, like Enoch

Brater's (1974) claims that the connection between Mouth and Auditor (and by extension the theatrical illusion) is sustained through movement, may allow the possibility that accessibility and inclusivity for performers and spectators fundamentally enhances the nature of 'mainstream' as well as disability theatre. Such a proposal is consistent with Hadley's (2014) theories, and with my own emphasis on the pertinence, for the lives of disabled people, of Goffman's (1959) use of theatre as a metaphor for everyday interaction. A similar concept was offered by one of my anonymous casting participants:

[D]irectors, it's their job to examine people, how people work, how people relate to each other, how people communicate with each other, those are the bases of what their entire job is built around. So the idea that it's not interesting to them that you have some sort of challenge, let's say how do you incorporate a D/deaf actor into your show, I think the fear barrier, if you can just pause it, behind that is a huge well of creative decisions you could make

The paradox raised by this comment, of fear inhibiting the fundamental workings of creativity, coheres with contributions from disabled and non-disabled participants alike as well as employment research discussed in Chapter Two (Foster and Fosh 2010). The idea of 'pausing' that fear is a powerful one. It evokes the theatrical suspension of disbelief more generally, as well as Jamie Beddard's (P, W, D) thoughts, quoted earlier, on the transformative 'moment' in the audience's perceptions of him as a performer. It also once again raises the question of responsibility; because one wonders whose 'job' it is to bring that 'pause' into effect. Having previously referenced Becky Barry's (P-I) belief that it ought not to be expected that the 'one D/deaf or disabled colleague in the room' take this on, it now seems important to return to her and her *own* sense of responsibility as a performer-interpreter:

[B]eing a hearing, sighted, non-disabled practitioner, in our, and I mean, like our little world which is really little, there is I think also, I feel a responsibility to say to, I hate this word but it's the only one that will really kind of fit, more "mainstream" companies that don't know, that don't know where our D/deaf and disabled colleagues are that could do an amazing job. I feel a responsibility to go this is great, and I really want to work with you, but can we, can I either share it,

[...] or if you're not quite ready for that because, *because* [laughs] how about we bring a D/deaf or disabled colleague in as a consultant for this process but then with the caveat that then for the next process they're not just a consultant because it's that, you'll know it, but that thing about "nothing about us without us". I feel a huge responsibility that sometimes I am part of the problem but then I am beavering away to stop that problem

The contrast between 'mainstream' companies and those focussed on disability is interesting when juxtaposed with a further comment from Becky, who added later in our discussion,

[f]or me, 2018 has been an amazing year of, dare I say it, finally, you know, seeing our D/deaf and disabled colleagues, they're *everywhere* at the moment, which is amazing, to the extent that I've been getting more emails than ever going "I really need a Deaf actor, you keep telling me about them, but none of them are replying" and I'm like "They're all booked! You need to ask them about this time next year *now* because they're so busy!"

However, before addressing the extremely positive implications of that shift, it is important to observe her consciousness of her privileged position and that she could be 'part of the problem' whilst also 'beavering away to stop that problem'. This awareness is reminiscent of the suggestion to pause made by the participant quoted from casting, who also battled at points with the validity of her contribution to these discussions.

Moreover, though, they both made reference to the relative power they have in their roles, and the possibility of functioning as an initial conduit for change. They return to another important thread of this chapter, found in many different forms – the concept of collaboration. Indeed, in both their hypothetical scenarios, the mention of a D/deaf actor is a useful example of this, because communication between D/deaf BSL-using and hearing members of an ensemble requires collaboration, either through interpretation or the hearing members learning to sign. This might go some way to dissolving the framework Becky 'hates' around "mainstream" companies, by illustrating that the distinction is false. It also provides yet another example of the essential theatricality of disability, because collaboration is fundamental to theatre.

A wider understanding of these two latter aspects in recent years may in part explain the increased presence of ‘our D/deaf and disabled colleagues’ Becky noticed. She shares this sense of a positive shift with almost all of my participants, both disabled and non-disabled. Nevertheless, she remained slightly wary, referencing colleagues from earlier generations who maintain a level of scepticism:

if you ask someone like the wonderful Jean St Clair, she would say “yes, but we’ve been at this stage before”, so the question is, is this just another little floating island of fashion or is this really gonna, you know, are we gonna kind of, join to the mainland this time.

This positive yet tentative attitude continues throughout the thesis, and is particularly prevalent in Chapter Five’s discussion of issues in the industry. Even with these caveats, though, there has been evident change just in the time that this thesis has been researched and written up. Most recently, Deaf performer Jamal Ajala was nominated and won for Best Actor in a Play at *The Stage* Debut Awards, and performer and Down’s Syndrome advocate Sarah Gordy was nominated for Best West End Debut (cf. *The Stage* 15/09/2019) for *Ear for Eye* and *Jellyfish* respectively.

The question now is how to maintain, retain, and advance that progress. For many of my participants, the solution is found in bridging the perceived gaps between the ‘mainstream’ and ‘disability’ theatre worlds – as in *Ear for Eye* (Royal Court 2018) and *Jellyfish* (Bush Theatre 2018, National Theatre [Dorfman] 2019). Furthermore, this bridge may be built by positioning the latter as part of the former – hence the focus in this chapter on reclaiming both Beckett more generally and specifically his character of Mouth. Returning to the production which inspired this discussion, Jess Thom (P) said:

I strongly identified Mouth as a disabled character and part of our excitement about presenting that was to reclaim her and to say that we don’t have to wait for amazing parts to be written for disabled characters. As you said we’re really lucky in that there are lots of parts that present disability and impairment. The issue that we have is that they’re largely written by non-disabled people and that they’re largely performed by non-disabled people. Therefore they don’t speak to disabled people, biscuit, and we don’t recognise them as characters that are like us.

The 'issue' she identifies has been at the crux of this chapter. It is reiterated here because once again her choice of words makes a subtle yet significant point. In her metaphorical use of 'speak' – 'they don't speak to disabled people' – she also hints at a literal definition of the word. In simple terms, they may not speak *to* disabled people because they do not speak *like* us; a concept which brings the chapter back to its beginnings and Jamie Beddard's (P, W, D) awareness of disability being his 'overriding feature' in terms of casting. In line with Sandahl (2005) and Dean's (2007) emphasis on neutrality, visible bodily difference may not be considered a 'wieldy' symbol (Dean 262) and therefore obscure people's perceptions of potential employability. This is seemingly compounded by theatre's auditory nature and reliance on particular kinds of communication.

David Bellwood (AM), Access Manager at the Globe, articulated it as follows:

there's a stop in place that's very clear for non-disabled actors to parachute off and then leaving their disabled colleagues behind whereby the agents are literally telling the casting directors this is a sellable body and therefore the consumer, we've constructed a system whereby the audience member is the consumer, and the consumer is consuming the same body type over and over again, you know, visually, audibly, however you want to do it, so if we completely removed ourselves from the world of the physical stage for a second and thought about those performers who have communication requirements or communication needs, even those voices aren't, aren't as commercial as the very plum, plum voice. The voice that doesn't stutter, the voice that doesn't have tics, the voice that doesn't slur, you know all of those attributes...

David's observation, which touches on Haynes' concept of 'physical capital' (2008, 2012) in its evocation of a 'sellable body', is especially pertinent in a chapter centred on a character whose voice is the only identifiable thing about her. Yet it also has wider implications. As discussed in Chapter One, the prominent position of both Shakespeare and the Globe in the UK theatrical landscape means that it possesses a certain amount of power to provoke change. This notion was a continuous thread of our conversation, along with the specific structure and atmosphere of Globe performances outlined in

Chapter One. It makes it a convenient conduit to the fourth section of this chapter, concerned with future possibilities.

*'Out, into this world!' – a potential map from Mouth into the future of employment opportunities*

From David Bellwood's (AM) thoughts on the audience 'as consumer', it seems appropriate to bridge these sections with an alternative perspective he offered as a solution to the casting problem he identified above:

I think it's very problematic to try and homogenise the experience of the audience member, the experience of the participant, so at the Globe we have really acknowledged that one performance might not suit everybody, but we have made adaptations to ensure everybody can come to at least one performance and Shakespeare is, is a series of opportunities and a series of barriers simultaneously.

This reframes the audience members as 'participants', acknowledging the interplay between those performing and those watching and/or listening (cf. Hadley 2015). It also emphasises the importance of adaptations such as interpretation, captioning and relaxed performances. Interestingly, parallel to developing a relationship with Battersea Arts Centre and exploring the possibility of it becoming a relaxed venue, Jess Thom (P) works extensively with the Globe. In an introduction to one of her performances of *Backstage in Biscuit Land* (2015), it was mentioned that some people might make noises during the show, but that 'that wouldn't be too different from the usual atmosphere'.

Similar to his suggestion that it is the venue's responsibility to cater appropriately to audiences rather than expect them to conform, David Bellwood (AM) felt (like Becky Barry [P-I] earlier) that this was equally true for performers. Using language recalling the management of 'impairment effects' (Thomas 1999), David spoke at length about his belief that

that burden of doing your job as an activist, as a representative, as an advocate, as an actor, as a listener to the qualms of others, as voice for the qualms of others, I mean that's impossible, those are exactly the things that are so important for a disabled actor to have removed on day one of rehearsal. I just say

“look you’re going to come with all of this, you’ve got to unshoulder that burden because otherwise you just won’t do your job properly”.

Such opinions cohere with social model perspectives on disability’s potential in theatre, like that articulated by Jess Thom (P), as well as the embodied ontological model (Shakespeare and Watson 2002; Shakespeare 2014). They also evoke Jodi-Alissa Bickerton’s (P, D) thoughts on the purpose of Graeae’s ‘aesthetics of access’ approach, being about ‘how we build the support in the room [...], so making sure that people, even if *they’re* not sure what they need, in any given moment that there is support there should it be needed’. This is equally reminiscent of Becky Barry’s (P-I) statements about responsibility and collaboration above, which she later reiterated in strikingly similar terms to David: ‘I’d love us to get to the point that our D/deaf and disabled colleagues, when they’re in a room, they’re not drowning in having to represent and can crack on with their job’. This makes an additionally interesting point about the impact of rehearsal processes on the eventual production. If the disabled performer is permitted simply to be a performer, they are positioned in good stead for their character simply to be a character – a ‘wieldy symbol’, in Dean’s terms (2007 262). To quote David again:

I think if that attitude comes across in our rehearsal, especially in our [The Globe’s] spaces, it will transmit during the play. So, if it is clear there is a D/deaf actor in play just being a character, if that’s absolutely clear in what the character is doing, it will become clear in the way the play transmits [...] the sad thing is [right now], the most interesting thing is that the actor is not making a comment about deafness. That shouldn’t be the interesting thing but the state, the place where we are currently would have that as the interesting thing

Of course the scenario he proposed in the first part of his comment is the ultimate goal, ‘the utopia’ frequently given as the answer (by both disabled and non-disabled participants) to questions about their future hopes for disability casting and representation in the UK. Unfortunately, as David pointed out in the second part of his comment, this is not the current state of play – or rather plays. In fact, as discussed in Chapter One alongside the phenomenon of ‘cripping up’, the opposite is often true. Indeed Becky combined her personal projection for the future with a vehement response to this practice:

Taking that as an infuriating starting point, let's get to the point where, okay, every year we're seeing at the National or we're seeing at the RSC, a Deaf Hamlet or a blind Ophelia, we're seeing and seeing and seeing – when we get to that point, *then* you can play those roles, okay? But it's 2018, so you might be waiting a while.

The conundrum is how to get from the current position to that future projected one – but whilst (in keeping with the wider industry) there are no certain routes, there are at least routes being mapped out by some. Intriguingly, within the context of Becky's comment, as discussed in Chapter One, it appears that the two major theatres she named are among the vanguard (also prominently including the Globe and Battersea Arts Centre). The RSC has hosted a landmark season featuring multiple D/deaf and disabled performers, including Charlotte Arrowsmith making history as the first Deaf performer to understudy a 'hearing' role (cf. Hemley 2019). The National Theatre has launched its ProFile database ([www.profileperformers.com](http://www.profileperformers.com)). This was discussed with Charlotte Bevan (NCD), the National's Head of Creative Diversity, in interview. She created it, in partnership with Spotlight, to address the aforementioned difficulty in finding D/deaf and disabled performers and to remove some of the reliance on verbal recommendation mentioned by practitioners like Becky Barry (P). Coming from a background in casting, Charlotte was perhaps particularly well-placed to understand how easy it is genuinely to miss certain performers:

the reason I set up ProFile was because, as a casting director, you pretty much have to know an actor's work to get them in to meet with a director. Sometimes you're working with directors who have very little time, who are very high profile or whatever. [...] So to do that, obviously, casting directors go to the theatre three or four times a week to just see everything. Now, what I found was, in seeing "everything" you're not seeing hardly any disabled actors in those shows because you get invited by agents who have someone at the Royal Court, or the RSC, or wherever. So you get into this cycle of seeing whatever you're invited to.

Like Olivia Hetreed (W) above, Charlotte wanted to use the access she is permitted, to break down one of the most basic barriers emphasised across the industry throughout

my research: being witnessed (being visible) and therefore offered the chance to be represented. This was a significant and discernible move in that direction, not least because she considers it the responsibility of a *National Theatre* both to serve its nation and to lead other venues to do the same. As she put it, by providing positive examples of possibilities, it is akin to ‘saying “look they’re doing it over here and isn’t it great?”’.

Such positive use of power, and the importance of having examples to point towards, underscores the profound potential of projects like Touretteshero’s production of *Not I*. In its situation, proposed in this chapter as simultaneously ‘radical’ and ‘mainstream’, it occupies a liminal position crystallised in Jess Thom’s (P) reclamation of the canonical Mouth as neurodiverse. At the same time, its small-scale incarnation means it still resides on the comparative margins in terms of both venue and particularities of script. In this context, its potency provides a stark contrast to *Wicked* and Chapter Five’s upcoming discussion of more difficult dynamics around representation and recruitment which remain in play in disability casting, as well as the significance of these issues being framed by a show of such vast scale and popularity.

## Chapter Five

### **‘This hideous chair with wheels!’<sup>2</sup>: The implications of positioning Nessarose as the driving force behind *Wicked* (the musical)**

Moving along the continuum outlined in Chapter One, from the radical to the ‘mainstream’, this second text- and performance-based analysis shifts from a small-scale show to focus on an example of what is perhaps the epitome of the theatrical spectacle: a popular and commercially successful West End musical which also features a disabled character in a prominent role. This chapter examines the characterisation of Nessarose in *Wicked*, predominantly its West End production, and across the source material (Gregory Maguire’s eponymous novel, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* [1996], and L Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* [1900]). It explores the implications of this portrayal for the interplay between representation and recruitment. It is therefore positioned as a primarily dramatic analysis rather than a musicological one – although music is central to its interest for this thesis. For, as Robert Softley Gale (P, W, D; Artistic Director of Scottish integrated theatre company Birds of Paradise) told me in relation to his recent musical project *My Left/Right Foot* (toured 2018):

you can sing things that you can’t say, you know there are things that you can put into song that if you had a character say them it would be very offensive, but if it’s in song, it works much better.

This chapter places that statement, and others from interviewees, alongside the particular context of *Wicked* in order to explore the significance of its status as a show. It asks whether the possibility of ‘singing things you can’t say’ positions the ‘mainstream’ popularity of *Wicked* as potentially ‘radical’ with regards to disability representation – or whether the production actually maintains much of the status quo, perhaps perpetuating many of the issues in the wider industry regarding representation and recruitment.

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<sup>2</sup> As the script is unpublished in its entirety, some excerpts are taken from the behind-the-scenes book, *The Grimmerie*, by David Cote (2005). Others are notes from memory following multiple viewings of the West End production.

*Wicked* (2006-present, in its West End version) is framed by Stephanie Woolf (2008, 2011) as conforming to the genre of the ‘megamusical’, after Jessica Sternfeld’s (2006) academic definition of the journalistic neologism for the genre, as ‘epic, sweeping tales of romance, war, religion, redemption, life and death, or some combination of these and other lofty sentiments’ (2). Its Broadway production is now the sixth-longest running show in the district’s history (cf. Gans 2018) with in excess of six thousand performances. The West End production is similarly successful, ‘already the fifth longest running musical currently playing in London’ (cf. *Wicked* UK news post 27/09/18) with in excess of *five* thousand performances (cf. *Wicked* UK news post 9/08/18). It has had numerous other incarnations globally, including in wider Europe, Australia, Singapore and Japan, as well as tours in North America and the UK and Ireland.

Despite my citation of Woolf and Sternfeld in the previous paragraph, although many areas connected to *Wicked* have been the subjects of academic analysis (most notably the 1939 MGM film adaptation of L Frank Baum’s original story, with the shortened title *The Wizard of Oz*), the musical itself has received relatively little attention. Moreover, when it does, the focus is either on its central character, the green-skinned Elphaba (Boyd 2010) or on the relationship she has with the other female lead G(a)linda<sup>3</sup> (Woolf 2008, 2011; Schrader 2011) – the musical and novel’s incarnations of the two most prominent witches of Oz. Indeed, Woolf (2011) posits the latter as ‘the musical’s larger purpose’ (4), foregrounding the connection between the women who alternately underscore and undermine the Wizard’s power and popularity. I seek to augment this reading by adding a third woman into the consideration of female empowerment, namely Nessarose. In doing so, I in fact return the focus to the triumvirate which is central to the original source material; Glinda the Good (of the South in the children’s story and the North in the film adaptation), and the unnamed Wicked Witches of the East and West. It is the third of these who becomes the titular character of Gregory Maguire’s novel and its resultant *musical* adaptation; both of which centre on, and extrapolate from, Elphaba’s response to Nessarose’s death.

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<sup>3</sup> Like most of the (few) scholars writing on *Wicked*, I use this bracketed spelling of her name – ‘G(a)linda’ – in recognition of the fact that she elects to change it during the course of the musical, and that my references to her will be from both before and after the change.

Positioned as a prequel to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Wicked* opens as it ‘follows Elphaba from birth to boarding school, where she is sent to care for her disabled sister Nessarose (who will become the Wicked Witch of the East)’ (Woolf 2011 2). It then chronicles her fraught relationship with the so-called ‘Wonderful Wizard’, who seeks to use her nascent yet powerful talent for magic for his own ends. This dynamic leads to the familiar ‘twister of fate’ (one of the show’s many intertextual puns and references to the wider mythology of Oz) and the subsequent arrival of Dorothy – or rather Dorothy’s house, which kills the aforementioned ‘disabled sister Nessarose’ (called ‘Nessa’ by most other characters). Indeed the necessity of this eventual tragedy (and therefore of Nessa) is acknowledged even by Stephen Schwartz, the musical’s composer, who says ‘we all know that the house falls on Elphaba’s sister’ (Schwartz, qtd. in de Giere 2008 loc. 4212). Furthermore, I quote Woolf’s summary of the opening scenes here because, whilst the focus is ostensibly on Elphaba (the Wicked Witch of the West, so named in Gregory Maguire’s novel in homage to L Frank Baum himself), Woolf’s wording illustrates the way Elphaba’s life revolves around Nessarose<sup>4</sup>. She only goes off to ‘boarding school’ in order to provide personal care support for her more-favoured sister. Moreover, in these early scenes, the Headmistress’ insistence that *she* will care for Nessarose is the catalyst for the revelation of Elphaba’s powers of sorcery. Overwhelmed with anger, she screams ‘Let her go!’ and unwittingly casts a spell which makes Nessa’s wheelchair spin out of Madame Morrible’s grasp and into her own. The connection between Elphaba’s magic and Nessa’s impairment is something noted throughout the rest of this chapter, which foregrounds Nessa’s importance, in relation to both representation and casting.

A move into these areas of discussion necessitates a return to Woolf because, despite observing that Nessa is in fact the sole reason for Elphaba’s attendance at the school, she highlights the ways in which her character (and impairment) is not fully explored beyond this role. Referencing Nessa’s transformation into the Wicked Witch of the East which, in the musical, requires her to change from a full-time wheelchair user with no apparent independent mobility to a totally ambulant individual, Woolf states that this

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<sup>4</sup> This is a point which could be taken much further, alongside an exploration of the possibility of reading Elphaba herself as disabled or chronically ill. However there is insufficient space to do the latter justice here because it would not necessarily impact casting – since Elphaba’s visible difference is denoted by her bright green skin.

'use of disability as a metaphor for evil is, simply put, an ideological blind spot' (2008 10). Aside from the probably unwitting usage of the ableist term 'blind spot', this framing of the disability representation as a metaphor allows Woolf to emphasise how 'Nessa emerges as what David Van Leer calls an "unintended Other"' (2008 10) rather than as someone whose life as a disabled person merits thoughtful investigation in its own right. She is framed, for Woolf, as a plot device – necessary yet also incidental. Such a reading, and concept, is analogous to Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) formulation of 'narrative prosthesis' discussed in Chapter Two. Also invoked as a contrast to Chapter Four's analysis of *Not I's* powerful reconfiguration of Mouth, this idea signifies a kind of representation where the realities of life with an impairment are erased in favour of disability being employed for the sake of a convenient moral.

The use of 'employed' is deliberate in cognisance of its multiple meanings within the context of this thesis, but it is important at this point to retain the focus on representation rather than casting, because the former has potentially significant implications for the latter. This is evident from Woolf's (2008) expansion on Nessa's relevance to the plot in the following short paragraph:

Nessa begins as a sweet girl, but eventually becomes the bitter and despotic governor of Oz. She is also desperately in love with Boq – a munchkin who loves Glinda – whom Nessa makes her slave-servant-houseboy-boyfriend when he refuses to love her in return. When Elphaba uses her power to make her sister walk, Boq tries to leave Nessa, but Elphaba, ever loyal to her sister, turns him into the Tin Man. (10)

The interesting aspect of this description is that it relates Nessa's significance almost entirely to her *reactions* to the actions of other characters. Its tone might be considered reductive and simplistic, but arguably this is the precise point, since it might also reflect the attitude, not just of her peers within the world of the musical, but of those responsible for its creation. The crux of this chapter, therefore, is to explore the implications of this attitude on the possibility Nessa as a character provides for representation and casting. It commences with an examination of the differences in her portrayal in the production and the source material of Gregory Maguire's novel.

*'See that tragically beautiful girl, the one in the chair?' – An exploration of Nessarose's representational significance to consider whether she could be more than metaphor*

The first, and probably most instrumental, point about Nessarose is that her character is almost entirely the creation of Gregory Maguire. In both the original Oz story and its popular film adaptation, her only relevance, and indeed appearance, is as the victim of the unfortunate placement of Dorothy's house following the hurricane. As already noted, this makes her fundamentally necessary to the plot – but nominally all we know of her is from hearsay and all we see of her is her legs. Ironically, in an apt metaphor for the foibles of disability casting, this limited yet specific appearance offered one of my participants (who otherwise had no connection to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* or *Wicked*) with what was technically his first role and the moment which inspired him to act. Adam Bowes (P) told me how, as a child, he went to his

future high school's production of *The Wizard of Oz* and the director had borrowed my prosthetic legs as the witch's legs under the house. So, I'm sat in the audience with my legs up there with ruby red slippers. Me and my friends were in the audience, really excited and I was like god I'd love to join them on stage and, so, I thought yeah I would love to be on stage.

This transformative moment for Adam's onstage career offers a parallel to the pathway of another participant, in terms of the *backstage* and production elements of theatre. Stephen Lloyd (P, D), now Artistic Director of the emerging company Amplified Theatre, told me how his experience as a cast member in Graeae's jukebox musical based on the hits of Ian Drury and the Blockheads, *Reasons to be Cheerful* (original production 2010, revival 2017), introduced him to the creative possibilities of integrated access. He said

It's one of those things, a bit like *The Wizard of Oz*, once you pull back the curtain it's hard to go back. Whenever I go back into a rehearsal room with companies, who are wonderful companies, but going back into a rehearsal room with companies who aren't making theatre that is accessible to disabled audiences or working with disabled artists, I feel like we're missing something. And I genuinely do, I feel like we're missing something and there's something not there and I think now, now that I'm very much in this world, I don't think I'd ever go

back. I would never make my own work, I would never *create* work, that was inaccessible.

This use of the story which inspired *Wicked* as an analogy for the fundamental power of inclusive and accessible performances for both audiences and artists is particularly interesting. When considered alongside the musical's potentially problematic messages with regards to disability which were outlined above, it offers a further point of relevance for the show to the more general context of this thesis. It links back to Nessarose's status as a character that nominally provides quite significant representation but might actually perpetuate, through a combination of casting and creative decisions, some of the essential issues for disabled performers in this industry. The presence, and treatment, of her character illustrates how the apparent plethora of roles within the wider dramatic canon (discussed in Chapter One, Chapter Two and elaborated on in Chapter Four's examination of *Not I*) does not always equate to positive or meaningful symbolism. It thereby connects to the experience of yet another participant earlier in their career, albeit in relation to a rather different kind of production from *Wicked*. Colin Young (P), said of his undergraduate degree,

somehow I managed to join the stage society and I got typecast as Tiny Tim in my first role, so that was fun [*laughs*], but then I went on to do some good shows and I really enjoyed that time.

That Colin's initial foray into university drama was possible because he 'got typecast as Tiny Tim' harks back to Black and Pretes' (2007) caution against excessive 'focus on the valiant struggle against the odds, where the disability is the central focus of a person's life' (82). It also touches on Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) concept of 'narrative prosthesis' in much the same manner as it could be applied to the presentation of Nessa in *Wicked* because impairment is used as an educative plot device. This is critical to acknowledge. However, the other aspect of Colin's comment articulates how this potentially problematic part apparently allowed him to prove himself as a performer, because he 'went on to do some good shows'. As a result, the role of Tiny Tim in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* could be positioned as being similarly transformative for Colin's undergraduate self, as the use of his prosthetic legs to portray the Wicked Witch of the East was for Adam's childhood self. Of course this does not justify the fact that

their presence onstage was predicated on, and reduced to, the visible signifiers of their impairments – and literally so, in Adam’s case, because it was his prostheses performing in his place. Yet it does signal how much *any* success in the theatre and television industries requires a way in in the first instance. This is a maxim which Dean repeatedly stresses is true for all performers; but which, as an extension of the different quality of competition for roles we encounter discussed in Chapter Two, various participants’ perspectives suggest is particularly prevalent for those who are disabled. As illustrated through Colin’s example of Tiny Tim, often the roles themselves function as gatekeepers. The value of such characters was explored in Chapter Four, in analysing whether the simple presence of disability representation should always be considered positive – and with regards to consequent questions about the responsibility of performers relative to the parts they portray.

To return to *Wicked*, which frames this chapter, it is necessary also to revisit Adam’s paradoxically simultaneous absence and presence onstage provided by the proxy of his prostheses. When considered alongside the extension of canon found in *Wicked* and its source, this is more than a humorous anecdote because whilst, in the musical, the witch now called Nessarose is a wheelchair user, in Maguire’s novel she is also a double amputee, and has no arms. This divergence is important in relation to casting, of course, but it has representational significance regardless of who performs the role. It was brought up by Katie Rowley Jones (P), who originated and then reprised the role in the West End production, and who I interviewed (alongside Savannah Stevenson [P], at the time playing G(a)linda) about their experiences of, and on, the show. Having been clear that the differences between the two texts made her refer less to the novel than the script, Katie nevertheless said

I love the idea in the book, you know the Wicked Witch of the East is, she’s discovered under the house in *The Wizard of Oz*, isn’t she? We all have this image of how she might have looked but you can only see from this far down, um, I suppose that’s, it’s probably the shock factor in the book, like, I know you were all imagining her to be an able-bodied witch, you know, what if she had no arms?

Aside from the potential ‘shock-factor’ Katie mentions, what is interesting about Nessa’s linguistic introduction in the novel is that it retains the focus on her feet. Consequently,

although (like Katie's performance preparation) this chapter's analysis makes little recourse to the original text, this section is quoted extensively below, to emphasise its emphasis on those two lower limbs and the way Nessa's mobility is affected. Through the third-person observational perspective of Boq, we are told that

[t]he deformities [sic] of Elphaba's sister were well-concealed, Elphaba had warned him; Nessarose could descend from a carriage with grace, providing the step was secure and the ground flat. [...] Had he not been warned, Boq wouldn't have taken Nessarose as Elphaba's sister. She was by no means green, or even blue-white like a genteel person with bad circulation. Nessarose stepped from the carriage elegantly, gingerly, strangely, sinking her heel to touch the iron step at the same time as her toe. Walking as oddly as she did, she drew attention to her feet, which kept eyes away from the torso, at least at first. The feet landed on the ground, driven there with a ferocious intention to balance, and Nessarose stood before him. She was as Elphaba had said: gorgeous, pink, slender as a wheat stalk, and armless. The academic shawl over her shoulders was cunningly folded to soften the shock. [...] Nanny propelled Nessarose gently toward the hansom cab that Boq had engaged. He saw that Nessarose did not move well without being able to lean backward against a steady hand. (Maguire 2000 159)

There are two elements of the above description which are relevant here. The first is that the nature of her impairment, as well as being concealed from her fellow Ozians and students by her shawl, is only explicitly revealed to the reader at the very end of a relatively long list of attributes, beginning with the adjective 'gorgeous'. On one level, this is in line with her repeated epithet in the musical, 'tragically beautiful', which forms part of the subtitle of this section. On another, though, it is its absolute antithesis, as the chair of the musical's Nessa is always the focus of everyone's initial attention. The second is Boq's final observation regarding the novel's Nessa's difficulty walking without the guidance of another person. This foreshadows the eventual use of the famous shoes in this version of the tale – they provide her independence via the medium of balance rather than an alteration in her own physicality or appearance. Such a distinction is important, because the latter is predicated on cure, whilst the former is not. This links back to the various models of disability outlined in Chapter Two:

especially Alison Kafer's (2013) 'political/relational' model, where she reminds scholars and activists alike of the importance of including and acknowledging the experiences of those disabled people who do desire forms of cure (2013 6).

However, as Kafer herself points out, the debates in this area are fraught, because 'medical representations, diagnoses, and treatments of bodily variance are imbued with ideological biases about what constitutes normalcy and deviance' (2013 5). Consequently, in line with further work on cure by Eli Clare (2017) and recalling the considerations of Tiny Tim earlier in this chapter, it is possible to posit that any *fictional* representation which does not include sufficient understanding of the 'nuances of cure' (Clare 2017 51) could perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Since the extent of Nessa's individual impairment is not explored beyond her inability to stand or walk, the presence of the cure moment could therefore problematise attempts to laud *Wicked* for positive representation.

This assertion is supported by returning to the words of Stephen Schwartz cited above, and observing that his acknowledgement of Nessa's necessity to the plot is mitigated by another, opposing, emotion – inconvenience, or even irritation. The full context of the earlier quotation reads as follows:

You can't know how many times we wanted to cut Nessarose out of the show. She's very inconvenient from a storytelling point of view. This is a story about the relationship between two women but there's this third woman hanging around and it's a pain in the neck. We would say, "If only we could cut that role, it would be so much easier." But we all know that the house falls on Elphaba's sister, so we couldn't cut her. (Schwartz qtd. in de Giere 2008 loc.4212)

Schwartz's claim that *Wicked* 'is a story about the relationship between two women but there's this third woman hanging around and it's a pain in the neck' reiterates Woolf's foregrounding of the 'musical's larger purpose' being to explore the connection between Elphaba and G(a)linda (2011 4). Its particularly vivid language also confirms the positioning of Nessa purely as a plot device.

This attitude towards her, which somehow simultaneously shores up her symbolic significance and sidelines the importance of her *representational* impact, has obvious

implications for casting, even before a further examination of the specifics like the change in her impairment and practical issues around accessibility. If the proposed representation of disability to be provided by a role is one apparently entirely uninvested in the reality of such lives, why would a disabled performer need to be considered for it at all? These sorts of questions underscore the reasons Nessarose might be emphasised as the epitome and example of the practice which initially inspired this thesis – ‘cripping up’ – and consequently articulate the crux of the employment barriers it explores throughout. Moreover, as referenced in relation to her cure, she might even be problematic in terms of representation regardless of the performer employed. The queries around casting are assessed in this chapter’s third section, with particular interest in the shift in her impairment in translation, or more aptly *transposition*, from the novel to the stage. First, though, the current section investigates whether, from Woolf’s designation of Nessa as an ‘unintended other’, it necessarily follows that her trajectory signifies ‘the musical’s use of disability as a metaphor for evil’ (2008 10).

During our interview about working on the show, Katie Rowley Jones (P) acknowledged that ‘in Act 2 we meet her [Nessa] as this very, very bitter character but I just, I just think, I don’t really see that nastiness so much, I just see someone who is so incredibly lonely and angry at the world’ and followed this assertion with a more detailed performer’s perspective on her character’s journey:

even though she’s in the background during Act 1 there are really careful little pointers within the direction to show how isolated she is. She’s always out on a limb, always you know, I can remember when, in the, when it was originally directed there were comments being thrown around, “don’t interact with her too much”, she’s isolated, you know she’s on her own, so you know, it is a very lonely track and so you do get that sense of what she would feel like whilst you’re in character, that she really is isolated. [...] She just wants to be loved, she doesn’t want to be alone, those are her worst fears I think.

Aside from the apt choice of phrasing in the comment that ‘she’s always out on a limb’, what is evident here is how Nessa is on the receiving end of a combination of ignorance

and being ignored. That this was not only acknowledged but utilised by the director as an explicit note for fellow cast members suggests an implicit understanding of the potentially harmful impact of the ways disabled people are treated in society. Moreover, along with the emotional distance, Katie went on to underscore the *physical* bases for this sense of separation:

[T]here aren't many people that I interact with on stage, there aren't many people that she interacts with on stage and I have moments off stage where I'm just sort of not, I think, I think it's symptomatic of the fact that she is quite a peripheral character and just peripheral in people's lives. She's not on eye level to people, you know, there's a reason why she's a peripheral character, that she's not for most of it in the thick of the action because of her disability

The most theatrically-obvious of these, perhaps, is the lack of eye-contact with other people that her seated position affords – but the lack of inter-cast interaction is also pertinent, because this discussion brought Savannah Stevenson (P) to a realisation about her own performance as G(a)linda. She said

I've only just realised, sitting here, assessing it that we actually, only in one moment do we directly interact and that's when you're actually coming back at me quite strongly for, for setting up Boq or whatever and not, not making it work and, and all the other times you're right there and I don't, I talk about you but not to you and I never even really considered that...

The scene to which Savannah referred occurs towards the end of Act 1, and centres on the departure of Elphaba from Shiz University for the Emerald City. In the midst of goodbyes from the small but now close-knit group of friends, the action plays out as follows:

*Boq Wheels Nessarose Onstage.*

**Nessarose:** Elphaba, I'm so proud of you and I know father would be too. We're all proud, aren't we?

**Elphaba:** You'll be all right, won't you?

**Galinda:** She'll be fine! Biq will take care of her, right?

**Boq:** ...It's Boq... I... I can't do this anymore.

*He Exits.*

**Nessarose:** Boq...

**Galinda:** Nessa, maybe he's just not the right one... for you.

**Nessarose:** No, it's me that's not right. Elphaba, just go, I'll be fine.

*She Wheels Herself Offstage.*

Whilst I concur with the significance of this act of verbal assertiveness, I would also emphasise the importance of an aspect which is perhaps more easily discernible on the page than on the stage, due to the implicit nature of stage directions in performance – and, additionally, probably more obvious to a fellow wheelchair user than an ambulant audience member. When she arrives in the scene, as is usual up to this point in the show, Nessa is assisted by someone else (in this case Boq) even though she can self-propel her chair. By contrast, when she leaves, she ‘*Wheels herself offstage*’ – thereby asserting physical as well as emotional autonomy. I should note here that she also wheels herself off during an earlier scene depicting the dance at the Ozdust Ballroom, but this is not made obvious, since she is not interacting with other characters immediately before she leaves the stage, and it was clearly a purely practical rather than artistic staging decision. Nevertheless the later moment *is* significant as it exhibits the combined physical and verbal assertion of independence.

The sense of Nessa’s passivity is prevalent throughout the first Act, but particularly in the first scene. Not only is she not permitted a chance to express her own wishes regarding her time at Shiz University, but the argument between Elphaba and Madame Morrible about the room arrangements is used as exposition for Elphaba’s magical ability, as follows:

**Morrible:** The Governor made his concern for your sister’s well being quite clear. So, I thought it would be best if she share my private compartment where I can assist her as needed...

**Elphaba:** But Madame, I've always looked after my sister.

**Morrible:** Everyone, to your dormitories.

**Elphaba:** But Madame... Let her go!

This latter, panicked order-plea provokes an unexpected spell, in which Nessa is spun out of the Headmistress' grasp and *into* her sister's. The pertinence of the movement is hopefully clear even without further details of the staging, but when these are added it gains a relevance to casting as well as representation. To separate the spell from the rest of the scene, along with a shift in the accompanying music, the stage fills with smoke – which is created by a machine carefully-concealed as part of Nessa's chair. The addition of this technology would greatly increase its weight, and make it cumbersome, requiring significant dexterity to control. Moreover, to ensure the accuracy and “success” of the enchantment, during this brief magical break the chair is actually moved by tracks in the stage. This renders its occupant completely passive and at the mercy of mechanics (just as *Nessa* is at the mercy of Elphaba's *magic*) which again would need quite a lot of physical flexibility and trust on a performer's part.

There are two pertinent points here: one related to casting and the other to representation. The first is that multiple elements of this scene would make it inaccessible to a disabled performer – if, of course, they could actually even get on stage, since the backstage areas of the Apollo Victoria are inaccessible in themselves. Katie referenced this in our interview, explaining,

so I come off stage and it gets parked, and I step out of it and it's looked after by stage management and then I just get back into it when I need to go back on stage so um, that's not an issue backstage [for me].

This observation on its own is striking, given the centrality of a wheelchair-using character, and is expanded in the next section. For now, it is important to note that this scenic inaccessibility would, of course, vary depending on the nature of the individual performer's impairment. Nevertheless, there are some general areas of difficulty, ranging from the smoke effect to the sudden movements.

The second point relates to the ways in which, regardless of the performer occupying it, fellow cast members interact with the wheelchair. This is a different issue to the ostracising of Nessa as a character, although the two are connected, as Katie went on to illustrate:

it really annoys me when people grab the chair when I'm in it and move it for me, or even just lean on it. I find that the most incredibly annoying, like this is, this is

actually part of me, this is my chair [...] what is an issue is people just thinking they can lean on my chair when I'm in it or there's a prop that some of them have, there's a scene where everyone has books and, and one lad, who, he pushes my chair on at the beginning of the scene and he has this book prop and he always puts, it's one bar, it's like an old fashioned bath chair, so it's got one bar along the back that you push the chair with and he hooks his prop book over the back bar bit and that really annoys me.

Perhaps this illustrates Katie's level of attachment to the chair after so long in the role, and it is congruent with another of my non-disabled participant's experiences, who said that she had 'learnt so much' about access issues after reluctantly taking the role of a wheelchair user in a Research and Development process where casting had proved difficult. Cognisant of the fact that disability representation ought not to be foregrounded as educative for non-disabled people, however, my interest is in the way such behaviour backstage could suggest how far the cast took the director's notes about Nessa's physical isolation and passivity. Moreover, the fellow cast member who hung his book over the back of the wheelchair seemingly considered this a perfectly natural and allowable action. It is therefore debatable whether this was simply because Katie got in and out of the chair, or if the response would be the same with a wheelchair user in the role, and thereby emphasises the more general pervasiveness of fully ambulant people's behaviour around a wheelchair.

To return to Nessa's emotional passivity, it now is necessary to explore the impact of slightly later scenes, preceding the dance at the Ozdust Ballroom. These scenes provide the impetus for her positioning, in this chapter's title, as the driving force behind the musical's narrative. They also link to the thesis' wider expansion of Dean's (2005, 2007) 'proxy' thesis because of their reflection of, and potential impact on, societal perceptions of disabled people – and wheelchair users in particular. When asked about them in our interview, the following exchange took place between Katie and Savannah:

SS: I think its sums up, a lot of, a lot of what happens to Nessa is because of what other people inflicted on you, make it like, um, you know, that whole setting, setting up for that which then actually affects hugely the course of your whole

pathway with Boq has actually not come from you at all, not come from your own empowerment at all. It's come from someone else setting it up for you and you going with it and believing it.

KRJ: Exactly, and I think that is, that is true of the whole of her journey, is that it happens to her. She is a passive party and her life happens to her and I think that's why she explodes in Act 2. I think it's interesting that she is, talking about Boq, she is a passive pawn in someone else's benevolence. She makes Boq look really benevolent, she makes Glinda look really benevolent, you know, Fiyero says after that interaction you have with Boq, "you're good" ...

SS: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

KRJ: I'm such a nice person and what would make me the happiest is actually if you took her to the dance, and then it's an opportunity for Boq to feel like he's really, benevolent.

The section of the scene Katie paraphrases here is sung, as are the majority of points within the musical where emotions are heightened. For easy reference, I quote G(a)linda's part in full:

**Galinda:**

SEE THAT TRAGICALLY BEAUTIFUL GIRL?

THE ONE IN THE CHAIR?

IT SEEMS SO UNFAIR

WE SHOULD GO ON A SPREE

AND NOT SHE, GEE

I KNOW SOMEONE WOULD BE MY HERO

IF THAT SOMEONE WERE

TO GO INVITE HER!

Whilst, on the surface, this keys in exactly to the tropes identified by Mitchell and Snyder (2000), as well as Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (1997) and Tanya Titchkosky (2007), where the disabled character is an object of pity and only included on that basis, it also keys in exactly to a very real insecurity and desire of Nessa's. As Katie observed, '[s]he just wants to be loved, she doesn't want to be alone, those are her worst fears I

think'. This is made clear through a dialogue she has with Elphaba prior to the party, when Elphaba is moaning about the absurdity of the plans being inspired by a 'silly little rich boy' who has persuaded everyone to join him. Nessa interjects to stop her negativity by revealing a secret the audience, of course, already knows:

**Nessarose:** Even me! I'm going! Isn't it wonderful? Boq was too shy to ask me at first, but once Galinda encouraged him...

**Elphaba:** Galinda?!

**Nessarose:** Don't you dare say another word against her! I'm about to have the first happy night of my life, all thanks to Galinda!

FINALLY FOR THIS ONE NIGHT,

I'M ABOUT TO HAVE A FUN NIGHT

WITH THIS MUNCHKIN BOY GALINDA FOUND FOR ME

AND I ONLY WISH THERE WERE

SOMETHING I COULD DO FOR HER TO REPAY HER

ELPHABA SEE...

WE DESERVE EACH OTHER AND GALINDA HELPED IT COME TRUE

WE DESERVE EACH OTHER, ME AND BOQ

**Nessarose:** Please, Elphaba, try to understand.

**Elphaba:** I DO...

This exchange, interestingly, marks both Nessa's most lengthy portion of spoken and sung script and the only point at which Elphaba properly takes time to listen. Furthermore, this shift is signalled not merely through the words that they both say but through their underlying orchestration, as the scene ends with Elphaba completing both the cadence and rhyme of Nessa's sung section, which she had split up by making a spoken plea. Apparently she was not confident enough to believe that her message would be conveyed adequately through song – so Elphaba reassures her by singing herself. Having already noted the significance of singing generally within the form of the musical, there is also a more specific relevance to emphasise. In her article titled 'Alto on a Broomstick', Boyd observes that, '[w]hen drama unfolds in a setting in which characters communicate through song as well as speech, evil witches and other villains are often marked by their inability or unwillingness to sing' (2010 106). She uses this to claim that Elphaba, whose vocal ability is paramount, is consequently, and

fundamentally, presented as good. On the above evidence, coupled with earlier observations around the centrality of her chair, I would extend this interpretation to encompass Nessa, and suggest that she deserves a similarly apposite subtitle, 'Alto in a Wheelchair'.

The practicalities of singing are explored later, because they have implications for the casting of Nessa, since she sings in both sitting and standing positions. Dramatically, however, in purely musical and harmonic terms, the scene discussed above is noteworthy – pun intended – because it features the first example of the repeated refrain 'we deserve each other', and the idea of deserving is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of Nessa's character. Arguably she fundamentally does not feel deserving of happiness. She is 'allowed to have a fun night' through G(a)linda's kindness and now feels she has a debt to repay. Rather than this being an entirely negative belief (however problematic and flawed), it does at least offer her a point of connection and solidarity with her older sister, who is only too aware of how this feels.

This sense of being beholden, and not believing in her own merit, carries through to her spiral in the second act, where she has used her powers as the new Governor of Munchkinland to restrict Munchkin rights and ensure Boq remains with her – but it is evident even in the dance scene which takes place relatively early in Act 1. Following a punning intertextual interaction, regarding the contents of the punch ('lemons and melons and pears! Oh my!'), Boq begins to sing, making similarly punning rhymes with Nessa's name:

**Boq:**

UH, NESSA...

I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO CONFESS A

REASON WHY, WELL, WHY I ASKED YOU HERE TONIGHT...

NOW, I KNOW IT ISN'T FAIR.

Nessa, in a manner comparable to her earlier conversation with Elphaba, breaks into the singing (this time Boq's rather than her own) with dialogue. Informing him that she

already knows, she then completes *his* cadence and rhyme, which leads to a brief duet. This culminates in the resurgence of the 'we deserve each other' motif and him completing *her* line through the pairing of 'dance' with 'chance':

**Nessarose:**

IT'S BECAUSE I'M IN THIS CHAIR, AND YOU FELT SORRY FOR ME...

WELL, ISN'T THAT RIGHT?

**Boq:** No... it's because... uh... because...

BECAUSE YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL!

**Nessarose:** Oh, Boq!

I THINK YOU'RE WONDERFUL!

AND WE DESERVE EACH OTHER, DON'T YOU SEE THIS IS OUR CHANCE?

WE DESERVE EACH OTHER, DON'T WE BOQ?

**Boq:** You know what? Let's dance!

**Nessarose:** What?

**Boq:** LET'S DANCE!

Although the course of this conversation could, on the surface, be considered to move from flirtatious to romantic (and Boq's eventual sung answer to Nessa's question to be as reassuring as Elphaba's earlier singing of 'I do'), there are several pointers to the contrary. Firstly there is the simple fact that this reply is, if not fabricated, then insincere; it is little more than an adjusted version of her epithet. *Everyone* acknowledges Nessa's beauty and it only augments the supposed tragedy of her situation. Secondly, even if it is meant, musically it merely offers Nessa one more opportunity to complete his couplet by rhyming 'beautiful' with 'wonderful' – which she then follows with two more questions he neglects to answer. Thirdly, whilst this neglect *does* allow him to move into a physical expression of feeling (through the suggestion of dancing) and thereby provide a rare and poignant moment of representation of apparently affectionate inclusion, the impetus of deflection undermines its effect. Finally, even if it were possible to take the romantic tone as read, without acknowledging any of these previous issues, the apparent melodic chemistry would be enough reason to doubt it. For, as Woolf notes throughout her feminist analysis of the

art form of the musical, any couple harmonising this early in a show is doomed (2011, *passim*.)

Additionally, too, Nessa's original interruption (where she rhymes 'chair' to his 'fair') shows that she understands the subtle yet insidious dynamics at play – and might even offer him a convenient escape clause. When he fudges his response to her first question, however, hope is seemingly rekindled; and she is thus set once again on the trajectory to her downward spiral and eventual death in Act 2. As Katie phrased it, '[s]he's clung onto Boq even though really she knows she's, it's not really her that he loves'.

To continue the theme of underlying discord amidst apparent harmony, even Nessa's sisterly connection with Elphaba is tenuous and has a short span. Savannah and Katie were both clear about this:

SS: Even, even Elphaba, because you could say, you could argue that, what she does is, is completely stifle you, to try and constantly be there for you, to constantly look after you, all of those things, even, even that relationship is flawed...

KRJ: Oh it is... it is and I think that's why they do come a cropper and it does come to a head because it is so dysfunctional, she's been, it's partly to do with Elphaba's guilt isn't it, she, she feels it's her fault that Nessa has the disability

If the emotion characterising Boq and G(a)linda's engagement with Nessa is best described as benevolence, then that which encompasses her relationship with Elphaba is (for Katie) guilt, and its companion concept of blame. She said '[t]hat's another interesting thing that it's, it's all born out of, you know there's an element of guilt there and the father obviously blames Elphaba for that, for [their mother and his wife] dying, so it's a source of guilt and a source of the rest of her family failing each other'. I would add that their father harbours his own guilt, which he attempts to assuage by offering her a lavish lifestyle and copious presents. Principal among these are the pair of shoes given to her in Act 1 sc2, as follows:

*Frex Holds Out A Box.*

**Frex:** My precious little girl: a parting gift.

**Nessarose:** Now, father... *He Pulls Silver Shoes From The Box.* Jewelled shoes!

**Frex:** As befits the future Governor of Munchkinland. Elphaba, take care of your sister. And try not to talk so much! *He Kisses Nessarose And Exits.*

The next section interrogates the literal and figurative impact of this symbol on practicalities relating to both representation and recruitment.

*'Longing to kick up my heels' – the significance of walking for Nessarose and considerations of casting*

As observed above, Nessa's transformation from a wheelchair-using individual to an ambulant one is the starkest of the musical's departures from its source in Gregory Maguire's novel. There are multiple aspects to consider, requiring a detailed close reading of the scene both as written and performed. It therefore seems essential to begin this section by offering the scene, if not in full then extensively, for reference:

**Nessarose:** Father's dead.

**Elphaba:** What?

**Nessarose:** He's dead. I'm the Governor... Well what did you expect? After he learned what you'd done, how you'd disgraced us, he died... of shame.

Embarrassed to death.

**Elphaba:** Good, I'm glad. It's better that way.

**Nessarose:** That's a wicked thing to say.

**Elphaba:** No, it's true. Because now it's just us. You can help me and together we can...

**Nessarose:** Elphaba, shut up! First of all, I can't harbour a fugitive, I'm an unelected official! And why should I help you? You fly around Oz, trying to rescue Animals you've never even met, and not once have you ever thought to use your powers to rescue me!

ALL OF MY LIFE, I'VE DEPENDED ON YOU

HOW DO YOU THINK THAT FEELS?

ALL OF MY LIFE I'VE DEPENDED ON YOU

AND THIS HIDEOUS CHAIR WITH WHEELS!

SCROUNGING FOR SCRAPS OF PITY TO PICK UP

AND LONGING TO KICK UP

MY HEELS...

**Elphaba:** Nessa, there isn't a spell for everything! The power is mysterious. It's not like cobbling up a pair of... *She Pulls Out The Grimmerie From Her Bag.* Wait.

**Nessarose:** What are you doing?

*Elphaba Begins Chanting.*

**Nessarose:** What is that? Ah! My shoes! It feels like... like they're on fire! What have you done to my shoes???

*She Lifts Her Dress, Revealing The Ruby Slippers. Nessarose Stands, But Falls.*

*Elphaba Gives Her A Hand.*

**Nessarose:** No, don't help me. *She Stands.*

**Elphaba:** Oh, Nessa, at last...

I'VE DONE WHAT LONG AGO I SHOULD

AND FINALLY FROM THESE POWERS SOMETHING GOOD

FINALLY SOMETHING GOOD...

The first aspect to explore, then, is the nature of the change itself. Especially to a predominantly non-disabled audience, the spell and its success would be an extremely joyful moment, as it is for Nessa in the immediate aftermath. As a result, an initial reading might suggest that the scene perpetuates a common yet problematic trope (discussed in sociological terms by Kafer [2013] and Clare [2017] at length, as well as Black and Pretes [2007] in the context of Hollywood films) where cure is privileged as the ultimate goal. Indeed, the creative team's approach to this specific scene arguably reinforces this first reading, in a similar manner to the more general attitude of the musical towards Nessa's character that was previously described. Schwartz's biographer, Carol de Giere, sketches Nessa's significance as follows:

The storyline for Elphaba's sister, Nessarose, added a special complication. In the novel, she is born without arms. For the stage version, the creative team decided to give her arms but confine her to a wheelchair. That allowed them to write a scene with the famous sparkling shoes – the ones that, in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wicked Witch [of the West] wants but Dorothy gets. In their stage adaptation of Maguire's book, Elphaba would cast a spell on the shoes to help her sister walk. (de Giere 2008 loc.3591, my parentheses)

Aside from what appears to be the ableist phrasing of ‘give her arms but confine her to a wheelchair’, the pertinence of this paragraph is the framing of the change as a ‘decision’ which ‘allowed’ them to maximise the scenic potential of the famous sparkling shoes by deliberately orchestrating a magical cure. Moreover, the original plans for the scene were even grander than what eventually featured in the production, and they were explicitly related to casting. The first actress to play Nessa on Broadway was Michelle Federer. As de Giere illustrates, this was not necessarily in line with Schwartz’s ideas for the particularly transformative walking scene:

Although Schwartz ended up being a fan of Federer in the role, at the time he dug in his heels, insisting on a seasoned Broadway dancer. He had envisioned an important dramatic scene with the famous ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz* film. Nessarose would be sitting in her chair as her sister enchants her shoes, and then she would take her first steps. “I thought we should cast a dancer, but Joe [Mantello, Broadway production director] didn't see it that way,” Schwartz recalls. “I thought there could be a really great moment when she stands up and walks. There could be some weird thing of clumsily and yet spectacularly doing something physical. I still think that's a missed opportunity. If Joe had been Bob Fosse or Gower Champion or Michael Bennett there would have been a dance at that section. It's screaming for it in devising a musical and Joe just could not see it.” (Schwartz qtd. in de Giere 2008 loc.4438)

The practical, professional and political implications of this ‘really great moment’ of clumsy spectacle will be dealt with shortly by returning to Katie Rowley Jones’ perspective on her myriad performances of it during her time as Nessa in the West End. Before that, it is interesting to note how the language used above by Schwartz clearly correlates with Woolf’s (2008, 2011) figuration of *Wicked* as conforming to the genre of the megamusical, despite Sternfeld’s (2006) own positioning of it as ‘something of a *post-megamusical*’ (349, my emphasis) due to its overt and ironic self-referential style. It is also reminiscent of a point made by one of my participants about another form of popular spectacle, albeit in television. In outlining her professional journey, Amy Bethan Evans (W) mentioned her teenage fascination with soap operas in relation to their plot construction, and said

I think in theatre there's a lot of snobbery about soaps but actually going back and revisiting them they really make an emotional connection. The reason they make an emotional connection is what in theatre is called, is often called exposition. You know they will, you can feel emotionally attached to a character after seeing them on screen for about 10 minutes because the stories are so fast-paced. I think that's what interested me, the way people engage with these characters and the way they talked about them.

I do not mean to draw a direct comparison between musicals and soaps here, because they 'do different work' in their audiences' imaginations – much like different kinds of impairments (cf. Garland Thomson 2009). Yet there *is* a parallel between the *ways* they do that imaginative work. In *Wicked*, that seems most striking in the character trajectory of Nessa; both generally and in the context of the 'cure' scene under discussion. As noted earlier, the development of her personality is almost completely due to Maguire's novel, and its further adaptation in the musical. Consequently, whilst the audience's engagement with Nessa is more extended than it might be in a soap, many members will have no emotional attachment to her prior to watching the show. Moreover, the spectacle of her personal climax (with or without the dance imagined by Schwartz) means emotions for both character and audience are deliberately dramatically heightened.

It is evident, from the creative processes cited above, that the casting of Nessa was actually subject to a great deal of consideration – but not of the kind called for by scholars like Black and Pretes (2007), Koppers (2007, 2017), Raynor and Hayward (2009), Johnston (2016) or Randle and Hardy (2017). It also apparently did not include an understanding of her impairment beyond the metaphorical possibilities it may afford. It thus renders her character's incarnation as a wheelchair user who learns to walk via a spell an archetypal example of Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) 'narrative prosthesis' discussed in Chapter Two. In the context of connections made earlier between the character of Nessa and some other participants' experiences, such as Adam Bowes' (P) career nominally beginning alongside his literal prosthetic legs, this phrase reads as additionally apt. It does not then suggest there was much space, in the

adaptation process, for an acknowledgement of the potential impact of such casting decisions or the resultant representation, namely the likely erasure of lived experience.

That said, it is important to remember that initial impetuses of the creative team are merely one layer of many in an eventual production, and the scene in *Wicked* exemplifies this. Aside from the fact that (in line with all iterations of the Oz story) she dies very shortly afterwards, it soon becomes clear to Nessa that walking was not in fact the magical solution to all her problems that she perceived it to be. Far from it, since Boq considers her walking as his signal that she is now self-sufficient, meaning he is free to leave her for his true love. Katie (P) articulated this subversion of expectations, both the audience's and Nessa's, in the following manner:

I think the trap that Nessa falls into is she is blaming a lot of external factors on her own happiness. If I had this I would be happy, if I had Boq I would be happy, if I could walk I would have Boq and then I would be happy but then at the end of the scene you see her on her own, in the Governor's mansion but with no one. Elphaba's finally given up on her and disowned her, Boq had been turned into a tin man and scarpered and that's interesting because she finally has the ability to walk but loses everything else almost simultaneously.

The moment alone to which Katie refers consists of Nessa's second most lengthy sung section, which, this time, is performed standing up. I shall return to this distinction shortly, but for now the melodic and lyrical elements are enough because they literally underscore her realisation, as she looks into the gilt mirror on her wardrobe, that acceptance from others was impossible without acceptance of herself.

ALL ALONE AND LOVELESS HERE  
 JUST THE GIRL IN THE MIRROR  
 JUST HER AND ME! THE WICKED WITCH OF THE EAST!  
 WE DESERVE EACH OTHER...

In the final reprise of her 'we deserve each other' motif, music and lyrics meld exquisitely to illustrate her epiphany, and offer a fitting concluding cadence in which her transformation from the nuanced character of Nessarose to the now archetypal Wicked Witch of the East is couched. In many ways, due to the shared alto range, it is comparable to the similarly transformative moment Elphaba experiences when she

sings the final belting ‘down’ in “Defying Gravity”. (A song indeed, in much more than just title, which could be equally applicable to Nessa’s journey.) Yet this is precisely the point – Elphaba’s realisation occurs at the end of Act 1, meaning that there is still an entire act to follow after the interval. Nessa’s, by contrast, takes place two scenes into Act 2. As the show is nominally about Elphaba, there is little leeway for rehabilitation (a word I use in cognisance of its charged meaning within the disability community) prior to the fate to which L Frank Baum’s original tale decrees she must surrender.

In light of the potential parallels with Elphaba’s defining (and *defying*) moment, Katie had an interesting perspective on Nessa’s reaction to her newfound ability; an ability which was, as is interrogated below, gained by way of her sister’s magic:

I think her reaction is quite, it’s not what the audience want to see and I think it must feel quite disappointing in terms of her relationship with Elphaba, the minute she can walk she pushes past her, like, wow that’s your sister who’s looked after you your whole life yet the minute you’ve got what you need from her, you’re pushing her away, she’s dead to you. She’s surplus to requirements, I just find that so harsh. I really enjoy that moment because I think it’s so awful. She goes to hug her, or, or it’s staged to look like I’m going to hug her but actually I push her out the way and shout for Boq.

Observing the split between Katie’s personal horror at Nessa’s actions and her delight as a performer in portraying them, I then asked her about her feelings regarding what I have termed ‘the cure of the curtain call’ (i.e. the moment when a non-disabled performer is revealed as such after portraying a disabled character), because I wanted to investigate how she felt about the transformation – and the possibility of bowing in the chair. As a wheelchair user discussing this with an ambulant fellow performer, I was both wary and intrigued to receive her response, but it led naturally to a conversation about the performance of walking more generally, as well as the reasons behind the shift in the nature of Nessa’s impairment in the adaptation from novel to script:

KRJ: I suppose because by the end of her journey she can walk, they’re following on from that, and I bow in the costume that I learnt to walk in, so I suppose following on from that story, sort of, chronologically at the end of my story I could walk I guess that’s why, but you’re right, that would be a really thought

provoking image wouldn't it though? I think that's the annoying thing, about that, about that journey that, I don't think that's the best writing, I shouldn't say that but that the way that suddenly she can just walk...

JP: Literally by magic...

KRJ: Because that's not what happens. I guess it's easier to depict that disability... That you could be someone sitting in a wheelchair pretending you can't walk

As with some of her earlier observations, there are two pertinent points here – one of which catches the crux of my thesis project, in that it articulates the ‘difficulties’ frequently associated with certain elements of disability casting. The second, though, is simultaneously more simplistic and insidious. This is an awareness that a wheelchair is an ‘easier’ signifier of disability – and reminiscent of my earlier observation that individual impairments are codified differently and evoke different responses from both self and other (cf. Garland Thompson 2009). Such distinctions are interesting and important on multiple levels, because they raise the issue of the visual nature of theatre – and television – and the fact that not all impairments are easily or immediately discernible. This, in turn, touches on the issues of both disclosure and identification, raised by many of my participants. For, whilst those with ‘invisible’ impairments might identify as disabled, they frequently have more difficulty navigating disclosure – and this would impact their status as ‘representative’ on stage and screen. Equally, although a ‘visible’ disability might remove choices about disclosure (cf. Hadley 2014) this does not necessarily equate to identification as disabled. Indeed, regardless of the nature of individual impairments, the process of coming to a disabled identity (‘coming out’ as disabled, cf. McRuer, [2006]) can be fraught both personally and politically. These aspects have been broached in Chapter Four, and are explored further in Chapter Six, but were articulated on a helpfully broad scale by Edward Kemp (D, DS), current Principal of RADA:

in a sense what we all mean is visible disability [...] But there are quite possibly plenty of disabled artists already working, indeed there is a real pressure [...] as actors get older when their eyesight begins to fail or they become hard of mobility. [Someone] who has terrible mobility issues as an actress in her eighties [...] she is damned if you tell anyone about it, she will not say “Actually you will

need to hire me a taxi to rehearsals,” because she will not admit to the profession, and so there is an enormous amount of hidden disability even amongst who we think of as working actors. [...] just making that a safer space would enable lots of conversations to begin to happen which would help all of us. [At RADA] 25% of our student body at any one time will have declared some kind of learning disability or learning difficulty, much of that is dyslexia. Now to an extent, dyslexia is so common amongst actors and the profession has become so used to it that we have almost discounted it, we’ve almost got used to it, that doesn’t mean people don’t have it, don’t struggle with it. So often we get people who have got through the education system until this point without anybody spotting it, we’ve even had people who have done degrees and it’s not spotted until they got to us and the profession has had to kind of learn to accommodate that.

The apparent ubiquity of learning difficulties like dyslexia meaning that ‘the profession has become so used to it that we have almost discounted it’ is interesting in relation to the various models of disability and the power to be found in socio-cultural shifts in understanding. It also raises issues around the negotiation of various ‘impairment effects’ (Thomas 1999; Williams and Mavin 2012; Foster and Williams 2014) and the access requirements associated with them, which will be discussed shortly. Additionally, though, the ubiquity invoked above might mean that individual circumstances are not separated from wider arrangements. This could consequently lead practitioners to doubt either whether their requirements qualify for support (under the predominantly medical model framing of legislation such as the Equality Act) or they can claim labels like ‘disabled’ or ‘neurodiverse’ (under the social or political/relational models).

These nuances around identity have particular relevance to Nessa’s character (and to her sister Elphaba’s) because, despite having an impairment made ‘visible’ by her wheelchair, she does not explicitly identify as disabled. In cognisance of Mounsey’s (2014) concept of ‘variability’ (discussed in Chapter Two), this is perhaps explained by her existence in a fictional society to which no specific temporal period is ascribed – another feature of the ‘megamusical’ genre as outlined by Sternsfeld (2006 3) – as well as the fact that, in the musical’s context, even the Munchkins are not ascribed their

popular disability significance. However, acknowledging the fact that the fictional society of *Wicked* (and Nessa's position within it) was created by people who live in a very specifically-located *reality*, it might actually signify the pressure to conform to the contradictory concept of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer 2006). As is evinced by the quotation in the main title of this chapter ('this hideous chair with wheels'), Nessa considers her body and her impairment essentially problematic. This is underscored by the climax of her trajectory as a character being framed as a cure. When we discussed this section of the show, Katie Rowley Jones said,

there is great purpose in that part of her storyline and I can't help thinking it's a shame and I don't enjoy that bit actually, I don't enjoy learning to walk... I just think it's a bit of a cop out, I don't know.

Such 'a cop out' is often used to explain the prevalence of the convention colloquially termed 'cripping up'. Katie's language illustrates her acknowledgement of this, alongside the annoyance she had more explicitly stated earlier, around the use of magic. More than this, it also signals a wider comprehension issue in society regarding wheelchair use. Simply put, it does not preclude the ability to walk. Quite the opposite, in fact, as the majority of wheelchair users are at least partially ambulant. Consequently, it may not be the walking itself which is the 'cop out', but the way it is framed.

Therefore, whilst this does not solve the questions around casting Nessa, I was interested in the practicalities involved in performing (in all senses of that word) the movement required to transition from sitting to standing and then walking. Not least because I am a fulltime wheelchair user with no independent mobility, and this is not something of which I have autonomous lived experience. As with our earlier discussion of the performance of walking more generally, Katie's response was nuanced and informative:

Yes, that moment when I learn to walk, um, being a musical, you know I have a certain amount of music I have to learn to walk to and I have a certain amount of music, or a certain amount of lines, you know with every piece of art there is an element of choreography and I have to go to the table and ring the bell for Boq and then within a couple of lines be back in the chair so that he can't see that I've learned to walk, as far as he's concerned I'm back in the chair, in the wheelchair.

Having to do that quickly but doing it as realistically as possible, and how would someone walk if they've just learnt to walk and it was by magic so, maybe if it *was* by magic I could, not only would I learn to walk within a second, but learn to walk perfectly as though I've walked for the entirety of my life. That, that always sticks with me, and I think, I do think about *that* every night and I'm torn between those two ideas of, well, it's magic so I could suddenly learn to walk perfectly but that doesn't sit with me well either, but then someone having a spell cast on them and learning to walk doesn't sit well either. Yeah, a bit agnostic with that bit, even though I've done it about 2000 times.

In cognisance of the privileging of choreography and music within the form of the musical that Katie alludes to, it is now pertinent to return to the distinction between singing whilst sitting or standing. This was another area in which I have lived experience of only one position (sitting as opposed to the standard of standing), so I once again sought Katie's perspective, having neglected to ask in our initial interview:

I'd say I was so used to the bits I had to sing sitting down that I never really questioned it. I had to sit very upright though, especially as I had a corset further restricting my breathing, but it's all a very alto speech quality range which made it easier; the lower the note, the less air required. The emotion was quite contained at the beginning of the scene (compared to the end anyway) so there wasn't the added adrenaline which made it easier. Also, it not being a full on aria made it easier - just singing a couple of lines here and there intertwined with spoken lines.

When these observations on air usage and flow are juxtaposed with the scene to which they refer, it makes sense that the belted phrase 'The Wicked Witch of the East' is reserved for the moment when she is standing. That said, it is not an explanation in itself for either the walking or the casting of a non-disabled performer, because when one only sings sitting down one develops strategies and sufficient stamina to sustain required notes. It is merely noted as further emphasis of the fact that these changes in vocal quality imply the role of Nessa was conceived as for a non-disabled performer, despite the integral part her impairment plays in the plot progression of *Wicked*.

Additionally, when considered alongside the central placement of Nessa's walking and its implications for casting, the singing does signal the paucity of available roles which both explore the nuances of disability life and are accessible and accommodating to the *disabled* performers who might wish, and ought, to portray them. This was articulated by Savannah Stevenson (P) towards the end of our interview. She said

I think the bigger problem is, in the industry people don't write roles for people who are disabled, often, to be able to fulfil those roles, and so what they prefer to do is if there is a role that demands a disability, they prefer to cast an able-bodied person to play the disability because it's easier for them on a practical level, like if you take the theatre, if you take our theatre, when you visited you couldn't access backstage, you couldn't. Your chair would not get in. So there is a practical...

Savannah's trailed off comment is a slightly broader phrasing of Katie's suggestion that Nessa's 'learning to walk' is 'a bit of a cop out'. It is thematically consistent with the observations of many of my other participants, both disabled and non-disabled, who stated that there need to be a wider variety of roles and opportunities. This first point was part of Chapter Four's discussion of responsibility, and is explored further in Chapter Six. The second point, in the latter part of Savannah's thought, is addressed here in relation to another frequently-raised issue – that of the practicalities of access, physical and otherwise. For instance, Abigail Gonda (W), working at the BBC at the time of our interview, told me it was important to be thinking about accessibility, but said 'accessibility isn't just like "can they get in the building?" It's about not worrying about finances, not worrying about being able to take breaks. It's thinking about, really coming at it in a truly accessible way and it's not just as simple as, "is there a lift"?'

Such sentiments reflect considerations discussed in Chapter Two, especially in Shinkwin et al.'s (2019) retrospective for the DDA's twenty-fifth anniversary, and wider narratives around Access to Work. Moreover, to connect to other participants as well, Arti Prashar (D, P), outgoing Artistic Director of Spare Tyre participatory theatre company, told me

every budget that we produce has an access budget line in it. When we say access, we're talking about "do they (performer/participant) need additional

transport, are they going to need a PA? What do we need to do in order to make this, give people the opportunity to be able to access what we do?" If you're working with women, they might need childcare, so we have these factored into our budgets. We articulate and we fight for them, so it is about your intention, it is about whether we truly believe in all this stuff or whether – put it into practice – or it's just rhetoric for you. I'm not saying it's easy, it's not easy. We have to negotiate – we have to negotiate with carers, we have to negotiate with families, if we have to we will also negotiate with transport systems. We're willing to do that, you know, because we know that's part of what we have to do. If we are going to genuinely do what it says in our mission statements, that we are here to reach the hardest to reach then they're some of the things we have to put into place. It is absolutely about integrity of policy, you know, where is, where are your ethics? Where is your ethos? And actually, are you putting them into place? So, there are issues around how to actually pay people because of the benefit system, I mean it is a nightmare, you know there is no two ways about it, it is a nightmare and we're having to negotiate with people individually because everyone has had a different package so it's about whether we're willing to do that or whether other institutions are willing to do that.

Both Abigail and Arti's perspectives widen the definition of access and accessibility, illustrating how they not only encapsulate more than physical barriers but also how they might have an affect beyond the realms of disability and impairment. This is particularly helpful in situating disability alongside other minority groups with regards to the connection between representation and employment; something which this thesis' contextual review showed (in line with the opinions of participants) still to be inconsistently achieved. Furthermore, Arti's references to 'ethics' and 'ethos' are simultaneously reminiscent of Edward Kemp's thoughts on attitudes towards dyslexia and link to a comment made by Abigail later in our interview, who said

I'm much more interested into how you make genuine, sustainable, meaningful change across all areas of broadcast, across all areas of culture. That takes time and it takes major investment and it's not a one-off inviting people to a party it's a how can we do this in a way that, that then completely changes the landscapes? I think it's totally achievable, it's just about having a longer view.

The desire to make ‘genuine, sustainable, meaningful change’ whilst acknowledging that that ‘takes time and it takes a major investment’ was in turn shared by Arti, who was pragmatic but ultimately positive and hopeful:

There’s huge challenges, we know there are huge challenges, but I always go back and say actually what is genuinely people’s ethos, you know? How genuine are they being in wanting to put this work across really? [...] I have a little bit more faith in I guess, in the next generations, the younger generations coming up because I think they’ve been given aspirations, they’ve certainly been educated so with that comes hopes and aspirations and I hope that we will see a significant change over the next ten/twenty years because that’s generational isn’t it, that’s how long it’s going to take, but it’s due.

Arti’s evocation of generational change was striking. It correlated with many casual comments made when the topic of this thesis came up in conversation with fellow practitioners, as well as with statements from my more structured interviews. Some of these have already featured in Chapter Four, and others follow in Chapter Six, but the sentiments were once again broadly articulated by Edward Kemp (D, DS). He said:

part of me absolutely thinks you know, I thought in lots of these areas of inclusion, the profession I entered in the 80s seemed to me to be going in the right direction and I’m really kind of, appalled that [...] we have not made the progression that I thought we would have made. [...] Somewhere in the 90s, for the next decade almost, things seem to have just stopped [and then] things seemed to be picked up again in the 2000s and really in this decade. I absolutely share the frustration of people who it, who it cuts much more personally than it does to me that we haven’t made that progress.

This retrospective, like the thoughts of Arti and Abigail, was useful because it came from a non-disabled person with an understanding of their privilege and resultant responsibility. It also emphasises again how factors like accessibility necessitate negotiation, and collaboration, between disabled and non-disabled people, which renders such binaries potentially unhelpful and problematic. The practical elements of such necessity, and the binaries they trouble, were crucial to Chapter Three’s methodology. Their significance to issues around identification and definition was

explored in Chapter Four with reference to Beckett, and it is connected to disclosure in Chapter Six. Concerns regarding privilege and representation are more relevant here because they return the discussion to *Wicked* and Nessarose. In the context of this musical, there is a somewhat confusing quandary. The representation of Nessa's impairment becomes, in a manner I am comfortable in acknowledging as a wheelchair user myself, more logistically complex in the process of adaptation from the novel. In so doing, it also removes the possibility of representing a different kind of impairment in the form of limb difference, which (as in the novel) would eliminate the fraught topic of cure at the same time as providing employment for a disabled performer whose access needs may not be considered as immediately 'impractical'.

In this vein, the perspective of Nadia Albina (P) brings together several of the significant threads throughout this chapter. She told me of her feeling of being unrepresented on stage ('I noticed, um, that there was never a disabled person on stage. And I also was quite struck by that'). She then observed how she initially struggled, during postgraduate training at LAMDA, to connect this feeling with her identity as a disabled performer:

I was very aware that it was going to be difficult for me, and as soon as I – I was the only disabled person on my course – I think I was the only disabled person in the school at the time, training – and I, in my final year, in my final six months when you do all the public shows, I got myself a prosthetic arm, 'cause from a casting point of view I didn't want to be seen by the industry as a disabled actor. And that created its own problems in terms of like, I put on this arm, and it changed my back, and I couldn't move – I wasn't as mobile, I wasn't myself. Um, and, I abandoned it in the final show, and I had met agents and casting people and I just felt like I was being a bit of a – deceiving people. Um, so I left LAMDA, and decided to embrace being a disabled woman, let alone actor, and that brought me to a journey of – I met, you know, I had many conversations with renowned theatres and casting directors who told me that it *was* going to be a problem for me, which I was aware of.

With this in mind, the changes to Nessa's character which figure her as a wheelchair user who then walks through a literally magic cure affect much more than *narratives*

around disability and impairment; they have the potential to impact the lives and careers of disabled performers and practitioners. For, despite the realism of certain interactions Nessa-as-wheelchair-user experiences throughout the show, due to a combination of physical access issues at the venue and the nature of the role itself, it is currently impossible for a wheelchair user with a similar level of impairment as Nessa to perform the part. As a result, not only is *that* employment opportunity negated despite her prominent representation, but it reduces the possibilities for performers (and aspiring performers) like Nadia to witness themselves onstage; something acknowledged by participants in casting as well as performers. Rae Hendrie (CA), made a direct link between thinking 'about representation [...] and that that will obviously encourage more people to participate so a child coming through who has a disability will see themselves reflected'. This is especially striking because it means the discovery of such characters can be as transformative in people's personal and professional realities as Nessa and Elphaba's own fictional journeys to self-acceptance and empowerment. As an example of this comparable to Nadia's above, Amy Bethan Evans (W), who is visually-impaired, told me how the casting of Amy Trigg (a wheelchair user) in one of her plays at Graeae helped her to understand,

from that moment on that this character's experience was about being disabled. It took somebody who was visibly disabled showing me that to, to show me that this was about my experience of being invisibly disabled. From that moment I thought, yeah, I am a disabled writer, I need to own that, that's what I can bring.

During our interview, this in turn led her to ideas around responsibility and access, stating:

I also think that everyone needs an identity as a writer and if my identity is a visually-impaired writer which it increasingly is becoming, then I have a massive responsibility to represent visual impairment in a truthful way, to cast visually-impaired actors, to refuse to let my work go on without visually-impaired actors and to put my work in accessible venues.

The triplet Amy sets out – of representation, casting and access – might be positioned as a sort of secular trinity for the theatre and television industries to aim towards; and thereby as an apt conclusion for a chapter analysing the wider scope of the current

issues encountered with these aspects through the framework of the particular production of *Wicked*. In order to connect this discussion to the next, the experience of Adam Elms (P) is relevant. Adam joined the ensemble cast of Amy's play *Libby's Eyes* (2018, Bunker Theatre) as the protagonist's father, Ron. In articulating the complexity of his thoughts on casting across a career spanning over a decade, Adam said

I think having a good sense of your own identity and your range as a person as well is a really helpful thing in our industry. I suppose, well interestingly, in terms of disability as well because I've started to see that much more as my identity recently I never really thought of disability before, I don't want to say before this job that I've just done but, you know, it was the first visually-impaired role that I've ever played and that's ridiculous when you think about it because I've had this impairment since I was born.

The last sentence of this quotation is particularly telling, because it illustrates a similar paradox to that encountered by Amy whilst at Graeae – albeit almost in reverse. Although Adam may not nominally have been providing representation in his portrayal of characters he played prior to Ron, the simple fact of his presence either on stage or television as a visually-impaired performer meant that he was, technically, representative of that community. The question of whether that representation ought to have been disclosed is a fraught topic, and one which emphasises the importance of multiple, and multifaceted, forms of representation to widen the sphere of responsibility. Following the reading of Nessarose suggested by this chapter, it is also a reminder that she, as a character, might exemplify the polar opposite position to Adam's as a performer. For she *does* nominally provide representation; very visibly denoted by the presence of her wheelchair on a West End stage such as the Apollo Victoria. Yet, returning to the trinity brought out by Amy Bethan Evans (W) above, the combination of aspects of Nessa's character trajectory, casting debates, and issues with the real-world accessibility of that same West End stage seem in multiple ways to undermine the power of that representation. Perhaps, even, to render it decidedly unrepresentative. This latter statement is particularly pertinent (poignant) when acknowledging that Nessa has been on Broadway since 2003 and in the West End since 2006 – yet it was 2019 which brought the first Tony Award win for a wheelchair user (Ali Stroker for the role of Ado Annie in the recent Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!*) and, in London, the first

Olivier nomination (performer-playwright Athena Stevens for her piece *Schism* at Park Theatre). Such disjunctions strike at the heart of this chapter's purpose: articulating and examining the problems and paradoxes encountered in the interplay of recruitment and representation with regards to disability casting. In evoking both adaptation and new writing, they also offer an opening for the themes of the next. This moves further towards the mainstream, and departs from theatre to television, analysing the BBC period drama *Call the Midwife* alongside issues of disclosure, heterogeneity and intersectionality in storytelling around disability.

## Chapter Six

### **'[She is] not a specimen, she's a mother!'<sup>5</sup> – the possibilities of adaptation and new writing for disability representation and casting in *Call the Midwife***

The previous chapter used the popular West End production of the megamusical *Wicked* to explore some of the issues encountered in disability representation and casting in theatre. This chapter continues the analytical journey from the 'radical' towards the 'mainstream', and also moves from theatre to television. Using the primetime television series *Call the Midwife* (2012-present, hereafter *CtM*), the chapter parallels Chapter Four in analysing how particular approaches towards the representation of disability and impairment suggest models for good practice. Alongside this, it begins an examination of the differences between theatre and television as potential providers of employment opportunities and representation related to disability, exploring how challenges in theatre might find solutions in television and vice versa. *CtM* is a medical period drama originally based on the memoirs of Jennifer Worth. Worth (2002, 2007, 2012) documented, in a partially-fictionalised account, her experiences as a lay midwife with a religious order in the Poplar district of the East End of London during the late 1950s. The show has moved on from its source material considerably, not least because the latest episodes (aired between January and March 2019) take place in the mid-1960s. Nevertheless this basis, and consequent period setting, means that the programme is uniquely positioned to offer a perspective on disability and disability representation which is at once distanced and immediate, by simultaneously engaging with past and present. Moreover, due to its medical elements, the frequent presence of and reference to disability and impairment might not in the first instance be considered noteworthy. Yet the scope and nuance of its inclusion goes beyond standard medical accuracy to have a discernible bearing on casting and employment as well as representation. It often subverts the expectations and conventions of not just the period it depicts but that in which it is made.

This might place it at the opposite end of the representational spectrum to my positioning of *Wicked* in Chapter Five. Throughout the analysis, I make regular recourse to the combined concepts of 'compulsory able-bodiedness [and able-mindedness]'

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<sup>5</sup> As the show scripts are not in the public domain, all references to dialogue are transcripts made whilst watching the official BBC DVD recordings of the relevant episodes.

(McRuer 2006; Kafer 2013) and ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich 1980, 1986) discussed in Chapter Two. This is in order to illustrate and explore the manner in which the show goes beyond its medical remit to depict and reinforce the idea that disabled people live, love, and build families in a variety of ways. The chapter also engages with Dean’s ‘proxy’ thesis, in both its ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ designations, and particularly with the possibility that *CtM* provides opportunities for disability and impairment to be considered as ‘wieldy’ symbols (2007 262) due to their appearance in multiple, and varied, narratives.

In so doing, the chapter once again queries the designations of ‘mainstream’ and ‘radical’ – not least by asking whether it is the consistent popularity of the show which makes such representation feasible. This is consistent with Kershaw’s (2013 [1999]) claim that, in representing the past, ‘[i]f the problems are subdued, [...] nostalgia and the commodity reign; but if they become explicit then a fresh relationship is created between present and past because history is being newly created, as multiple histories come into play’ (183) and is based on the fact that, as audience statistics illustrate, it has been successful from the start. The finale of *CtM*’s first series reached audiences of over 9 million, making it the most successful new drama series on BBC One since 2001 (cf. BBC News 20/02/2012). Over the eight series and Christmas Specials broadcast since 2012, it has reached consistently large audiences in the UK, including record-breaking figures for the second and third series (cf. Plunkett 2013; Sweney 2014, 2015, 2016; Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board figures for 2018). It is also ‘sold to almost 200 territories worldwide’ (McGann 2015 123).

The show centres on the fictionalised Order of Anglican midwife-nuns, The Sisters of St Raymond Nonnatus, who live in and work from Nonnatus House. They are supplemented by a shifting ensemble of lay nurses and midwives from a variety of backgrounds, who have their own continuing character arcs across each series. These arcs are impacted by engagement with particular patients, most of whom feature for one or two episodes each. Within that structure, there is representation of potential impairment from the first episode of Series One (with the birth of an extremely premature baby), through to the most recent eighth series featuring an orphan with Cerebral Palsy, and including the fourth series which depicts disability and impairment in almost every episode. It would therefore be impossible to cover all instances of their

inclusion across the show so far. This observation in itself illustrates the general commitment to representation in the show. In this chapter, however, I restrict my analysis to three plotlines which most explicitly allow for discussion of casting and employment, and also conclude with the finale of Series Six, the most recently aired when I began writing up.

In the chronological order of the show, these three plotlines are as follows. Firstly, across two episodes of Series Two and Three, the relationship between Sally Harper and Jacob Milligan (portrayed by Sarah Gordy and Colin Young). They are two young adult residents at the local care home, St Gideon's. Secondly, across several episodes of Series Four and Five, the traumatic brain injury of a young nurse, Delia Busby (portrayed by Kate Lamb), in a relationship with one of the midwives, Patsy Mount (portrayed by Emerald Fennell). Thirdly, early in Series Six, the pregnancy of a young mother with achondroplasia, Penny Reed (portrayed by Rachel Denning). In these analyses, significant episodes are labelled by series and episode number (for instance 4.8). The discussions principally engage with the perspectives of these characters and the performers who portray them, of whom I interviewed Rachel Denning (P), Kate Lamb (P) and Colin Young (P). However, they also involve frequent mention of Sister Julianne, the principal midwife-nun at Nonnatus (portrayed by Jenny Agutter) and Dr Patrick Turner, the local GP (portrayed by Stephen McGann). Other characters mentioned briefly are identified at relevant points.

Having previously referenced the relevance of the wider literature of Rich (1980, 1986), McRuer (2006) and Kafer (2013) to this analysis, it is also important to recall the *CtM*-specific commentary of Stephen McGann (2015). McGann's distinction between 'accuracy' and 'authenticity' was introduced in Chapter Two due to its pertinence to the wider thesis project, and also features in Chapter Three's methodology. However, his article in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* utilises the combined perspectives afforded by the particularity of his aforementioned position as a performer playing the show's GP, and the knowledge he gained whilst completing 'an MSc in Science Communication' (2015 123). Consequently, an elaboration is better placed here. Moreover, he provides one of the few sources of scholarship on a show which, like *Wicked*, has received relatively little academic attention.

In formulating his theory, McGann states that:

[i]t might be tempting for professionals to measure effectiveness of medical portrayals purely in terms of a narrow procedural accuracy. Yet I suggest that the real communicative power of drama lies in a wider sense of dramatic truth, or authenticity of portrayal. How the TV medic depicts something is only a part of the story, albeit an essential one. More important is establishing a belief in who this medical character is, and why their actions matter. This is crucial to achieving full engagement with the medical themes, characters and outcomes shown – without which all procedures are meaningless. (2015 123)

The language used in the passage above is similar to many of my participants' calls for more nuanced disability representation which does not reduce characters to their impairments – and especially evokes the debates around disclosure and identification brought out in Chapter Five by Adam Elms (P) and Edward Kemp (D, DS). Furthermore, it is consistent with *CtM*'s commitment to foregrounding casting of disabled performers across the show, which led me to propose earlier that it permits disability and impairment to function as 'wieldy' symbols (Dean 2007 262). This is illustrated later, through the shorter storylines of the disabled couple Sally Harper and Jacob Milligan and first-time mother Penny Reed. Yet McGann's particular perspective, playing a 'TV medic', is most relevant to the plot of Delia Busby, whose job as a nurse positions her as a parallel. I therefore begin with Delia's arc. It offers the opportunity to examine, over a much longer trajectory, the combined personal and professional impact of an impairment which is both acquired and hidden.

*'I lose my train of thought sometimes' – Delia Busby's traumatic brain injury and the complexity of casting in the representation of acquired and/or hidden impairments*

As is evident from the introduction to this chapter, Welsh nurse Delia Busby is far from the first disabled character depicted on *CtM*. She actually joined the show fairly late (in its fourth series). Moreover, her initial appearance gave no indication of the particular plotline which would result in her traumatic brain injury, and consequently did not identify her as disabled. Indeed, if such political terms are appropriate to apply retrospectively to the late 1950s and early 1960s (following the cautions of Mounsey [2014] against anachronism), she might rather be explicitly identified as non-disabled.

Nevertheless, all of these caveats explain her relevance. She acquires her impairment over the course of her wider trajectory, during which she has already established fulfilling relationships with the rest of the ensemble – most notably her long-term partner, Patsy Mount<sup>6</sup>. Delia also demonstrates a strong sense of selfhood, if not always self-confidence, both prior to and following her injury. As a result, her impairment is an important (but not the defining) aspect of her character. This in many ways positions her as the polar opposite of *Wicked's* Nessarose; and thereby as the specific representational bridge between this chapter and the previous one. Moreover, also unlike Nessa, the casting of a non-disabled performer in the role of Delia is not predicated on her cure (although she does 'recover' in a sense) but rather on her physical and mental state *before* the acquisition of her impairment. In cognisance of the work of Kafer (2013) and Clare (2017), this may seem a subtle distinction based on semantics (i.e. the replacement of 'cure' by 'recovery') but I shall argue it is significant and grounded in a great deal of nuance, especially within the context of the rest of the show.

It is important at this point to explain Delia's character trajectory. She is introduced in 4.2, when she assists Patsy at a Cubs meeting. Afterwards, to avoid disturbing another (heterosexual) couple's disagreement, they hide in the chapel at Nonnatus House. Later in the episode, the true nature of their relationship is confirmed, when Delia comforts Patsy following a stillbirth. Although this episode is not part of the arc around Delia's injury, it is of interest because it highlights how the storyline she shares with Patsy is framed alongside heterosexual romance from its very beginning. This framing sets up the subterfuge necessary to maintain a lesbian relationship in the period (cf. Rich 1980, 1986; Gardiner 2003) and thereby lays the ground for the events ultimately resulting in her injury (cf. McRuer 2006).

In this discussion, the focus is more specifically on 4.8-5.3, which show Delia's journey around her injury most explicitly. In 4.8, Delia and Patsy decide to rent a flat together. After their first night there, Delia is late for work. She borrows Patsy's bicycle, but

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<sup>6</sup> Like Elphaba in *Wicked*, it would be possible to extend a disability-centred reading to Patsy's character, due to her struggles with what would now be termed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from childhood experiences in Japanese internment camps during World War Two and subsequent family bereavements. However, also like Elphaba, these aspects of her character have more immediate bearing on representation than recruitment. There is therefore less opportunity to discuss their interplay in relation to her character, and insufficient space to do her the justice she deserves.

collides with a vehicle, resulting in a traumatic brain injury and temporary retrograde amnesia. A confused Delia and a devastated Patsy are separated, possibly permanently, when she is taken home to Wales. However, in 5.0, Delia comes to London for checkups, and recognises Patsy through the window of a bus. They reunite in a café and have a covert conversation about their relationship and Delia's progress. This is followed by a more private conversation in a telephone box, where Delia states her determination to return to London and nursing. In 5.1 they meet for tea with Delia's mother to celebrate her now 'spotless bill of health' and a soon-to-be vacant position on her former ward. Mrs Busby forbids Delia from returning to London, but Sister Julianne later suggests she lodge at Nonnatus House. In 5.3, Delia moves into the convent and restarts her job.

The above trajectory illustrates that Delia is foremost a practitioner rather than a patient – a distinction she herself draws in 5.1, telling Patsy, 'I walked into that hospital a patient and walked back out an employee'. Such a binary might appear problematic to modern audiences, because it perpetuates beliefs that disabled people ought not to work in medicine (cf. Dr Hannah Barham-Brown, who suggests 'we are seen as a novelty in the workplace' [qtd. in Shinkwin and Relph 2019 6]). Yet it is nevertheless appropriate for the period. It also subverts expected dynamics for disability representation in a medical drama, by expanding it beyond the aforementioned 'patient of the week' storyline (most often 'mother or child of the week' in *CtM*). This permits a more detailed exploration of the impact of impairment than is potentially possible otherwise; especially if the disabled character is a baby featured in a single episode.

Moreover, when considered alongside McGann's observations about accuracy and authenticity, the patient/practitioner binary Delia herself verbally acknowledges might not evidence a medical model perspective. It could instead be consistent with either the social or political-relational models, because of her sense of her wider personal identity, or her 'belief in who this medical character is' (McGann 2015 123). I make this claim on the basis that her return to work is not framed by simplistic reduction or negation of the effects of her impairment but rather by her desire to rebuild her relationship, and life, with Patsy. She articulates this explicitly during their second conversation in 5.0:

DELIA: They say the headaches will fade away. I just need to rest for a little longer. Not that my mother will let me do much else.

PATSY: Will she let you come back to work?

DELIA: I *have* to come back to work. Back to London. This is where my life is. And where *you* are.

PATSY: Deels. I'm not going anywhere. But you can't come back if they don't give you a clean bill of health.

DELIA: They will. I'll *make* them.

This exchange on its own exhibits Delia's desperate determination. However, the edit of the episode also positions the conversation very particularly. It is bookended on one side by the cosy domesticity of the newly-married Nonnatus handyman and his wife, and on the other by Patsy and Delia's attempt to kiss in the snatched privacy of the telephone box, which is interrupted by someone shouting 'People out here are waiting'. This framing, and especially Delia's quiet retort to the shout, 'People *in here* are waiting', seems to expose how she confronts the combined forces of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness repeatedly throughout her convalescence. It foregrounds the complexity of navigating a pairing of social ideologies which 'functions by covering over, with the appearance of choice, a system in which there actually is no choice' (McRuer 2006 8).

Moreover, such policing around both sexuality and disability is most obvious through her relationship with her mother. Kate Lamb (P) made a similar connection, stating that she worked with Maxine Evans (playing Mrs Busby) to explore 'how having Delia home had only strengthened Mrs Busby's control over her daughter at a time when she was struggling to rebuild her memories and come to terms with the fact that she was missing a huge part of her life in London, while it didn't seem to be missing her at all'. This comment was in reference to Delia's change of heart over the course of 5.1, and her apparent capitulation to her mother's insistence that she abandon her career. After being excited and hopeful at the beginning of the tea celebrating her final appointment, Delia is silent and subdued when Mrs Busby asserts her maternal authority. She later telephones Patsy at Nonnatus to apologise because she 'can't leave Mam'.

Kate mentioned frustrations with her character from a performer's perspective, because she 'couldn't stand seeing her dreams stepped all over out of some bizarre desire not to upset or disappoint her Mam', but she also said:

I certainly feel that you can never "judge" a character or their choices if your job is to play them. There is absolutely a responsibility for you to understand the reasons why your character is the way they are.

These comments are striking in their similarity to those of Katie Rowley Jones (P), in Chapter Five, regarding her horror at Nessa's behaviour towards Elphaba once she can walk. Despite Nessa and Delia's very different environments and emotional impetuses, the comments offer further reasoning for placing them in opposition within the wider context of this thesis. It also illustrates another necessary navigation: the split between performer and character.

In the case of Delia's arc between 4.8 and 5.3, better comprehension of her actions could be aided by considering compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness not merely as combined forces but as potentially *contradictory* ones. Delia's 'decision' to return to Wales seems to be based on guilt and an internalising of her mother's beliefs about her capacity, as well as Mrs Busby's disapproval of London and all its associations (namely Delia's freedom to be self-sufficient, and live and love as she wishes). Consequently, I posit she forfeits the assertions of her own abilities which were so prevalent throughout 5.0, and then supported by Patsy over tea in 5.1: 'But that was six months ago! Delia's made a complete recovery!' I suggest that Delia's return home would mean her simultaneously opting out of compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness and opting *into* compulsory heterosexuality. Her mother's dominance denies her not only physical and emotional independence after her injury but, in capitulating to it, she also abandons the opportunity to be her true self.

The reasons for this shift are most obvious in the aforementioned telephone call in 5.1. Delia says of her mother, 'I owe her so much and she's fighting so hard'. This illustrates that she has minimised many of her own struggles to accommodate Mrs Busby, although *Delia* is the one who has been 'fighting so hard'. Patsy's reply, asking resignedly to see her before she travels home, highlights that neither of the young

nurses can imagine a pathway forward. The solution to this apparent impasse is particularly pertinent, both to this specific storyline and to the wider ethos and impact of the show, because it comes from Nonnatus House. The convent is a place where (whether despite or perhaps because of its religiosity) many of the period's social mores around difference are frequently suspended or challenged. Whilst both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness remain very applicable within its walls and the work of the Order, the expected adherence to these norms has a different quality framed by collective acceptance of individual idiosyncracies. This is demonstrated over a lunch later in 5.1, when Sister Julienne uses phrases like '[f]amily meals are very important at Nonnatus House, Mrs Busby'. Then, her response to the news that Delia is returning home due to a lack of suitable accommodation is, '[y]our daughter is welcome to lodge here with us'. Her reflexive offer suggests that her implicit aim is to underscore Delia's value *regardless* of her current state of health.

It is important to note here that the argument thus far does not doubt the reality of Delia's recovery. It is very clearly signposted throughout the trajectory of 4.8-5.3, and she herself makes no further scripted mention of her continuing symptoms beyond 5.0. Although on one level, as Patsy says in 5.1, 'it still seems too good to be true' that Delia has made such significant changes across the relatively short span of six months, it is scientifically plausible that she did so. Moreover, due to the constraints of both the period and the ensemble nature of the storytelling, recovery was necessary in order for character and performer to remain in the series. As Kate Lamb (P) said of her research in preparing for this aspect of the role,

[b]rain injuries are complex and, rather luckily, can take so many different forms and people can and do make full recoveries and obviously that had to be the case if Delia was seriously going to be able to go back to nursing.

My point, therefore, is not to debate *whether* Delia recovers but to highlight how, either way, she had to *present* as recovered within the multiple particular contexts of the show – not least to be able to continue the other important representation provided by her relationship with Patsy. This latter observation has bearing on casting as well as narrative representation, but for now returns the argument to the work of Stephen McGann. Referencing the fact that his character, Dr Turner, behaves very differently

from his modern counterparts and that this has been the subject of some criticism, McGann asks, 'is it more "accurate" to represent a modern medical health exemplar, rather than a plausible period character?' (2015 124). He then seeks to answer this question by differentiating between the two aforementioned concepts of accuracy and authenticity, often considered synonymous, stating:

I use the word "accuracy" here as the means by which one identifies a character as an exemplar of a particular class of medical professional through procedural action – and "authenticity" as the process by which we create a particular doctor – a unique human individual – within this social group. It is this particularity of character that gives drama its communicative force – a character's loves, fears and motivations. My job is not simply to represent an acceptable approximation of all doctors through my actions but, through portrayal of an individual medic, throw a light on key human aspects of doctors' lives and experiences. (2015 124)

McGann does not make this distinction to excuse behaviour which would now be considered outdated or problematic. Far from it, because he later offers Dr Turner's smoking habit as an example, admitting, 'I find it repellent' (124). His aim is to illustrate the importance of including such aspects to enhance the overall nuance of a character's position in the period setting, by exploring what he terms their 'loves, fears and motivations' (124). My argument for Delia, and her professional persona of 'Nurse Busby', has similar foundations. These relate back to the way her desperation to return to Patsy exposes the socio-political structures of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness, which she must either conform to, or subtly subvert, if they wish to continue their relationship. Moreover, I suggest this dual navigation inspires her growth as a character, and individual incidents, of either systemic homophobia or doubts about her physical and mental capacity as a nurse cannot be separated out in representational terms. Rather, they impact and inform each other, and are equally essential to her identity. The culmination of this line of thinking is traceable to yet another tea scene in a much later episode, 5.8, where Mrs Busby, Delia and Patsy discuss future plans for Delia's career and a holiday, both of which require her birth certificate:

MRS BUSBY: I don't know why you don't move in with your Auntie Blod and save on all that rent you're paying in the convent.

DELIA: If I decide to train as a midwife, I have to live in hospital-approved accommodation. East Finchley will be too far away.

MRS BUSBY: What do you mean, train as a midwife? You don't want to be doing such a nasty, personal sort of job!

PATSY: *I do it.*

MRS BUSBY: I know you do. You two are as thick as thieves. And this butter is too cold for these teacakes.

PATSY: Mrs Busby, would you give Delia her birth certificate?

MRS BUSBY: What for? So she can book herself onto this training course?

PATSY: No, so she can apply for a passport, because she isn't going to Pembrokeshire for her holiday next spring. She's coming to Paris. With me.

MRS BUSBY [to Delia]: I'm not an unsophisticated woman. I've been to Jersey – and the Isle of Man. You always did things your own way. [Gets birth certificate from handbag] I can bear it if you upset me, I'm your Mam – and you're a grown woman.

PATSY: Thank you, Mrs Busby.

MRS BUSBY [to Delia]: Just don't do anything to make your dad cry.

Following the trajectory of Delia's relationship with her mother previously explored, this scene can be read as a 'coming out', and begrudging acceptance (albeit tinged with emotional manipulation). It also illustrates again that Delia's primary motivations result from her love of Patsy, the strength of which allows her to assert her independence. That this happens through the acquisition of her birth certificate is additionally significant. In the context of the amnesiac effects of her accident, the certificate is a tangible symbol of her selfhood. Moreover, alongside my earlier reading of the different ethical qualities at Nonnatus House, Delia's decision to retrain whilst

lodging at the convent could indicate that this environment, and its associated discipline of midwifery, is more conducive to professional flexibility. If so, both her career choice and the birth certificate could signal the lingering presence of her impairment. They thereby offer a fictional parallel of the real-world requirement for the management of 'impairment effects' (Thomas 1999) within the work environment (cf. Williams and Mavin [2012] and Foster and Williams [2014]).

Of course, since none of the above aspects are explicitly scripted, it is difficult to pinpoint their definitive representational impact. This would depend on inferences made by individual viewers. Nevertheless it is plausible, through McGann's (2015) framework, that they are all part of Delia's particularity as a character. Kate Lamb (P) raised this complexity when asked about how she approached Delia's later arc during Series Six:

I think the trauma of the accident continued to affect her – seeding doubts about her ability to study and retrain as a midwife – making her question whether her life with Patsy had all been in her head in Series Six. Not knowing if her memories would be all she had left and if she could really trust them. But you don't see a lot of that.

Here Kate mentioned the combined plotlines of Delia's change in specialism and Patsy's absence for the majority of Series Six whilst caring for her dying father in Hong Kong. Kate was clear that the accident remained a reference point in her portrayal of this parallel arc of separation. Her focus on the *emotional and psychological* impact of the event, which Kate later suggested made Delia 'a slightly more cautious and careful person, aware that things are fragile and delicate and can be lost in an instant', adds another layer to the representation her character affords. It also underscores my own assertion that Delia continues to navigate compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness. The attitudes of the era would have meant it was impossible to be open about her struggles with either a remaining impairment or her sexuality. She would necessarily have had to keep them hidden for professional and personal safety. This created a challenge for Kate's portrayal which gives further credence to my argument, as she said '[i]t was a difficult thing to drop in because Delia

really has no-one to talk to about it. Nurse Crane [a more senior nurse and midwife at Nonnatus] offers a very quiet understanding but Delia's loneliness is almost total.'

The specific nature and context of Delia's storylines, as discussed thus far, raise questions about the requirements, duties and expectations of both representation and casting – and the consequent interplay between them. To quote McGann again, he observes that '[t]he idea of a medical character being judged as representative rather than particular can expose some interesting assumptions and subjectivities in an audience' (2015 124), and suggests this is what leads to some of the critical responses to the show, especially with regards to its depiction of period medical procedures which do not necessarily adhere to modern standards. In line with Dean's 'proxy' thesis (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b), I would take this further and apply it to audience responses to characters on a wider scale, and also argue that the presence of impairment within a show or production might heighten this tendency to impose present categories and comprehensions retrospectively onto the past.

This possibility has been a thread throughout this section of the chapter, beginning when I questioned my own definition of Delia as nominally non-disabled. It is important to revisit that, along with a reflection on the work of Chris Mounsey (2014) and Tom Shakespeare (2014). Both suggest impairment ought to be considered a spectrum which thereby renders disability essential to the human condition. Whilst cognisant of their careful caveats, discussed in Chapter Two, the relevance of their combined concepts here is in bringing together McGann's comments with those made by one of my interviewees. Rachel Bagshaw (D) is not connected to *CtM* and predominantly works in theatre, but her experiences and practice offer a useful perspective on the significance of Delia's storyline. Firstly, she highlighted the nuance required in 'defining what we mean by "disabled"' and the way that (as Edward Kemp [D, DS] articulated in Chapter Five) that definition is frequently simplified or flattened for the sake of 'visible' representation, especially in such visual media as theatre and television. Secondly, to demonstrate this, she spoke of her dilemmas in casting her semi-autobiographical show *The Shape of the Pain* (2017 onwards).

As its title indicates, the piece is about life with chronic pain, and this was the source of Rachel's creative and representational difficulty in casting. Despite being a wheelchair

user herself, during the research and development process, she realised it was crucial 'that the pain wasn't located in that person's body, it was in everything around, that the show was made out of'. This realisation arose for two reasons – a desire to immerse the audience fully in the experience of chronic pain, and an acknowledgement that, with a visible sign of impairment on stage, this immersion would be mitigated. She worried people might subconsciously associate the pain with that marker and thereby miss the show's message about the totality of *living alongside* chronic pain. Consequently, as she repeatedly stated, 'it was really key for me that it was a body in which we couldn't locate the pain'.

Whilst this led to (self) doubt about the nature of the representation she was providing through such casting decisions, it links back to Chapter Five's analysis of *Wicked* by making a pertinent point about what *constitutes* representation, and further, what can be considered 'good' or 'accurate' representation. This was underscored by another aspect of her show's research and development process, which involved working with a performer who had a chronic pain condition but who was not 'out' as disabled in the industry. As a result, for Rachel, it was interesting that the performer's 'body, as a kind of canvas for that, didn't express pain, didn't express impairment in any way, and yet she had lived experience of what the subject was of the show'. Ultimately the collaboration with this particular performer (which Rachel 'would have been very happy with') was unfeasible for the eventual production due to conflicting schedules. However Rachel raised it to emphasise that the performer's perfectly valid decision not to disclose her impairment meant an audience would not 'read' her as disabled. Whilst that was in some ways precisely the point of the show's creative framework, it would also mean she might not be regarded as 'representative', despite her daily reality – much like Adam Elms (P) in Chapter Five.

Linking the discussion back to Delia's character in *CtM*, such conundrums around the complexity of 'disability passing' (Brune and Wilson 2014) have an obvious bearing on her representational possibilities. However, they also raise questions about the way representation is connected to casting. From observation of trends relating to the depiction of disability in 'mainstream' television and film (Barnes 1992; Black and Pretes 2007), the physical effects of accidents are often *overrepresented*; a point also made by some of my disabled performer participants, because this has provided them

with repeated work opportunities regardless of the realities of their own impairments. By contrast, the impact of Delia's injury is largely cognitive and psychological. This makes it less 'visible', but also potentially more fluid – not least because, although her symptoms are discussed, an exact diagnosis of her particular injury is never given. These factors point to problems in attempts at 'impairment matching' of performer to character (cf. Wilde, Crawshaw and Sheldon 2018). Moreover, returning to the earlier argument about Delia's navigation of both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness, I posit that *visible* impairment matching might undermine the very important political message *CtM* was seemingly aiming to convey about the combined prejudices of its period. This is arguably much like Rachel Bagshaw's (D) dilemma around her show – but also, to connect again to Chapter Five and *Wicked*, an example of the way nominally non-disabled casting in a disabled role could have an impetus to provide positive rather than negative representation. The inclusion of Nessarose's wheelchair in *Wicked* is *documented* as a plot device, and the primary signifier of her relevance is her learning to walk. Whereas, the invisibility of Delia's impairment arguably has the opposite effect to Nessa's because it is not the main focus of the audience's attention.

A similar sentiment connects such a reading of Delia's character not just to *Wicked* but to the third storyline considered in this chapter. Colin Young (P), who portrayed Jacob Milligan across two episodes (2.4 and 3.5) much earlier in the show's trajectory, was passionate about casting in interview and deplored the convention of 'cripping up'. Nevertheless, he offered a crucial caveat:

The one thing I would say against myself is that, if you make it, what was it, *The Theory of Everything*, Stephen Hawking had a very, very unique impairment. He's the only person to live as long as he did with his impairment, and he started as non-disabled, so I, people were saying you could use two actors or blah-di-blah but that would still not be acceptable in modern cinema. So I do think, where degeneration is involved, that using a non-disabled actor is potentially more acceptable. [...] I think disability is a tough one because we can't have it both ways, disabled people can't say the world should be inclusive because at any point anyone could become disabled and then say "Oh, but disabled people have unique experiences and you don't know what you're doing", so it is a very hard

line to navigate. I think that where a disabled person *could* play the part, they should. I think things like the French one about the disabled guy and the PA [2011 film *Les Intouchables*, UK title *Untouchable*] or the Bryan Cranston one [2019 American remake, *The Upside*], they're just purely inspiration porn, they shouldn't be done. But I think where the presentation of the disabled person is done in a way that it could only be played by an able [sic] person, I think that's where the line should be. As much as I would like to I could never play a non-disabled person, so I think it's only right that if someone is portraying degeneration they should start as non-disabled.

Colin's point that he 'could never play a non-disabled person' is pertinent both to his episodes (2.4 and 3.5) and chimes with observations made by Rachel Denning (P), below, about her character in 6.2. It is also striking when paired with the discussion (in Chapter Five) of Colin's first foray into student drama as Tiny Tim. Here, though, his perspective helps to elucidate the significance of *Delia's* character – because her arc offers just such an example of degeneration.

Moreover, Colin's opinions reflect quite closely the enquiries made by Stephen McGann. McGann continues his analysis of accuracy and authenticity, regarding the gap between period and modern medical concepts, asking, 'are some forms of accuracy simply more acceptable than others?' (2015 124). This is an especially important question in the context of both acquired and hidden impairments, for several reasons. Firstly, as Kate Lamb (P) observed above, brain injury is complex, and also exists on a spectrum of a wide variety of effects. Consequently, alongside *Delia's* accident, McGann's question might be rephrased as: are only people with the most visible manifestations of it (for instance Cerebral Palsy, mine and Colin's impairment) allowed to witness themselves being represented? Also, since Alison Kafer's concept of 'able-mindedness' has been so relevant, her reminder to include 'those disabled people who are interested in medical intervention or cures' (2013 7) in the groups deserving of representation is as important here as it was in Chapter Five's examination of *Nessarose*. Combining this observation with Rachel Bagshaw's (D) discussion of disclosure, McGann's (2015) question could be expanded again, to ask whether it is always the responsibility of disabled people to provide representation directly through their work. As Rachel phrased it,

I necessarily kind of, now, accept and embrace that it is also my responsibility, as someone “other”, to keep working with people and ensure we move this on [...] My practice is inherently informed by my lived experience and it always will be because as artists it’s always going to be informed by who we are and the way we live our lives but for instance [my current project] has got really very little to do with whether I’m a disabled person or not

These queries (especially around disclosure, passing and responsibility) exhibit the fluidity of practitioners’ professional interactions with their personal and political sense of identity. They also recall Chapter Four’s discussion of Touretteshero’s *Not I* as an example of reclaiming representation within the dramatic canon. However, they have a further significance to *this* chapter. They permit a connection between the disability-centred aspects of Delia’s experience as a character with those related to her sexual orientation, and also illustrate the importance of a performer’s interaction with a script. The combination of these three elements emphasises how she (and her casting) provides an instance of *representation* which is just as important as a visible sign of her impairment. This is found in her lesbian relationship with Patsy, as was underscored by Kate Lamb (P), who said

[t]he Christmas episode was the most we saw of Delia in her ‘still unrecovered’ phase and it was really important for me to have a conversation that was written on the page as quite ‘normal’ and ‘unaffected’ and be able to inject a certain amount of struggle and distraction, whilst still being driven by the one thing that I wanted Delia to just *know*, without question, without hesitation, even while not even being able to articulate it – that she loves Patsy.

The referenced conversation is from 5.0, and is where this section gets its subtitle, ‘I lose my train of thought sometimes’. When they reunite in the café, Delia tells Patsy that once she regained the ability to write she ‘sent three letters’. She then realises her mother did not post them. This leads to an exchange concerning whether Mrs Busby suspects their relationship, as well as the fact that she does not want Delia to return to work. The connection between these two issues offers further evidence for my argument throughout about compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness. The conversation also illustrates Delia’s still fervent feelings

for Patsy and her anxiety that these might not be reciprocated. She says 'I lose my train of thought sometimes' in slightly bewildered response to Patsy grasping her hand beneath their table. Patsy in turn replies, '[i]t's better than losing *you*', confirming their shared history and continued connection regardless of current circumstances. Comforted by the dual physical and verbal validation, Delia has the confidence to be more open:

DELIA: I'll be on the bus back to Hornsey soon.

PATSY: I don't know what I'm supposed to say to that.

DELIA: You're supposed to say, 'Don't disappear again.' You're supposed to say, 'Meet me again, write to me. Don't break the thread. Let's pick up all the broken pieces. Let's pick up where we were.'

PATSY: Can't I just say, 'Come back'?

DELIA [smiling]: Yes.

This section of the scene is an important if subtle articulation of the innate nature of sexuality, alongside disability. Delia's short speech shows that her confusion remains but she is still sure in her love for Patsy. It thereby offers scripted evidence of the implicit signs discernible during the episode featuring her actual accident (4.8), where, as Kate Lamb (P) said, Delia 'didn't have her memories, she's unsettled by things she clearly doesn't understand but should, and she is still concerned by the woman crying at her bedside. I believe that's the moment Delia fell in love with Patsy for the second time.' Consequently, the scene underscores the capability of disabled people of all orientations to love and be loved; offering intersectional representation which is rare across UK drama regardless of medium or genre.

Ending the specific storyline analysis on this observation of subtlety reflects one of the most prominent themes across interview contributions, especially regarding hopes for the future of disability representation and casting. The thematic prevalence of subtlety takes the form of calls for more nuanced *portrayals*, but it also encompasses acknowledgement that the *approach* to casting and representation needs to be more nuanced. In a comment connecting the perspectives of participants such as Edward Kemp (D, DS) and Arti Prashar (D, P) – from Chapter Five – to those of David Bellwood

(AM) and Becky Barry (P-I) in Chapter Four, as well as those of Colin Young (P) and Rachel Bagshaw (D) in this chapter, an anonymous participant in casting said:

The future is that stages look like the world. That stages in the UK look like the UK. Because currently they just don't. [...] That would be my kind of general ideal, [...] obviously this isn't gonna be the case on every show, for example, in terms of ethnicity, some shows are very specific about casts [...] So the programming, I guess there's another level to my sort of ideal which is that the programming allows for that to be the case, and is conscious of it, so you go "yeah, you might have the odd show here and there that is really specific, and there may be shows which don't have any disabled actors in, there may be shows that don't have very ethnically diverse casts, there will be shows where there are more men than women in the cast, but it's got to all be mitigated across the programme".

The context of this was theatre, but it is of interest here due to the point about programming. As outlined in Chapter One, and discussed throughout this chapter, *CtM* was selected for analysis because it not only includes disability but does so in a wide variety of ways. Indeed, as a parallel plotline to Delia's accident, 4.8 explores the pregnancy and labour of June Dillen (portrayed by Deaf actress Genevieve Barr). June's storyline is both period accurate – Nurse Crane, one of the older midwives, refers to her as 'the little deaf and dumb lady' – and positive. It contains important messages about acceptance, and also communication, featuring concurrent use of spoken English and BSL. Additionally, alongside the rest of Delia's accident arc, the show enters its fifth series by depicting the birth of thalidomide-affected babies following prescriptions of Distaval for morning sickness. McGann (2015) observes this dedication to education, albeit with reference to earlier storylines about cystic fibrosis and neonatal death. He states that

[i]n addition to individual expertise, our production engages assistance at an organisational level for issues with a significant social impact [...] These subjects can have strong communities of support, specific vocabularies, conflicting public perceptions or painful social histories. (124)

I argue it is this combination of deference to the period and commitment to featuring a diverse *range* of characters and plotlines related to disability (the show's 'programming') that allows for the arc of a character like Delia. If she were the sole example of disability on the show, the subtleties of her experience might be *too* subtle to afford proper or appropriate representation, in line with all the caveats given at the start of this section. At this relatively early stage of what my participants variously celebrated and bemoaned as *yet another* drive towards inclusion of disabled people in employment across the industry, nuance remains a luxury. Nevertheless, as demonstrated throughout not just this chapter but this thesis, it is not merely a goal but a possibility – and perhaps even the purpose of dramatic representation. To link *CtM* with the words of my interviewee who said 'the future is that stages look like the world', I refer again to McGann. He suggests that the power of drama in general is that

[i]t connects with an audience not simply by physical depiction of events but via an examination of consequences – emotional, medical and personal. Drama delivers vicarious insight into what other realities might mean for people in other situations. A fictional multiverse of our own possible futures. In doing so, it tells us about ourselves, and about the things we all have in common. (2015 125)

The interest of linking these two quotations is that they refer to different media – theatre and television. As a result, their connection evokes another aspect of this research, exploring their differences and similarities as potential platforms for employment and representation. What does it mean if a strategy proposed by a participant for the future of theatre is already finding fruition on a television programme? To answer, I initially return to Rachel Bagshaw (D). Despite her own experience being predominantly in theatre, and her opinion that 'theatre should be the perfect medium to kind of reimagine', she nevertheless said 'to be honest I think TV's doing better than theatre, really'. The reasons for, and the veracity of, this apparent disjunction are explored throughout the rest of this chapter. It is a site of division among all my participants. Some felt the opposite, that theatre was ahead, and others had a balanced perspective. For instance, Rachel Denning (P), who played Penny Reed in 6.2, had this to say 'overall':

[t]heatre, is much more of a collaboration, there is a rehearsal process, sometimes even time and money to take part in Research and Development. This ensemble nature of creating work means that it is generally more suited to each individual and each individual is given the time and value. Where in TV, everything is a lot quicker and everyone has their own specific job that they are there to do and they stick to you – maybe less room for collaboration – which makes it harder maybe to include disabled actors and characters appropriately. I love both mediums – I love the community that comes with being in theatre and being with a live audience, but I love the detailed performances that you can create in TV.

With this balance in mind, and in keeping with the nuances discussed so far, it is interesting that Rachel said later she ‘found “CTM” fascinating and humbling’. It is this experience on her episode which forms the focus of the next section.

*‘What if we can’t manage her?’ – Penny Reed as a positive example of a disabled mother*

This section moves to focus on a more visible impairment in the life of a patient. It centres on a single episode, one of the ‘mother of the week’ storylines from 6.2. This later episode goes beyond Jennifer Worth’s source material (2002, 2007, 2012). It uses the narrative surrounding Penny Reed, (a young mother with achondroplasia, portrayed by Rachel Denning [P], who shares her impairment). It explores the possibilities provided by new writing for both positive disability representation and the recruitment and employment of visibly disabled performers.

The episode’s opening shots show Penny checking her makeup in the mirror before heading out to an appointment:

[PATSY places stepladder for PENNY to get onto examination table]

PATSY: We don’t appear to have your full notes. Where were you before?

PENNY: We were Whitechapel, Nurse. Dr Treneman on Alderman Row.

PATSY: And this is your first pregnancy?

PENNY: It is. My only baby.

PATSY: Let's see how baby's getting on. Cold hands I'm afraid. That's all feeling jolly good! [PENNY chuckles, relieved] Now, let's have a listen to baby's heartbeat, then blood pressure, urine sample and we'll book you in for a home visit.

PENNY: Oh, I shan't be at home. I'm to go to St Cuthbert's for my caesarean.

PATSY: We'll want to see you regularly now, and, well, it'll save you the journey.

PENNY: Never dared hope for such treatment. I think, perhaps, because I'm smaller, people think my hopes are not so great.

This first example of extended dialogue emphasises the way in which the episode not merely allows for, but explicitly exhibits, a visible melding of the *performer's* navigation of her 'impairment effects' with the parallel navigation required by the character she portrays. Penny needs the stepladder to access the examination table for her check-up in this fictional environment of clinical care. *Rachel* needed it, and other items like it, in order to access (and participate in) the *reality* of her working environment. Such accommodations illustrate that, in the space of one series, the show, and perhaps society, moves from exploring compulsory able-bodiedness towards actively representing different methods of access to, and engagement with, communities. As is acknowledged in the next section, this representational strategy has in fact been present since Series Two, but the context here is different since it centres on a professional woman. Penny Reed is a self-employed seamstress as well as a housewife. Like the focus on Delia's nursing career, the substance of Penny's storyline is much more centred on those professional and personal aspects of her life, although her disability (along with its dual social and medical implications) remains present. This allows Penny to be a 'wieldy' symbol of the kind foregrounded by Dean (2007 262), with significance beyond her impairment.

In this vein, linking Penny's representation back to the recruitment and employment of the performer portraying her, I posit that the stepladder, and similar props, aided Rachel in doing her job and thereby something she considered 'important':

to get back to the simple idea of that I am a professional actor and I, like every actor, want the opportunities to play a variety of roles – roles which challenge and interest me.

This answer to my question for all performer participants about their sense of responsibility in the roles they play was intriguing in that it was evocative of, and coherent with, the words of David Bellwood (AM) at the Globe, who said with reference to a wider definition of responsibility,

I think it's more difficult for a disabled actor in a room to fully concentrate on acting when there are other social issues always circulating, anything at work, you know anything at work.

This extra 'anything at work', from impairment effects to attitudinal barriers and expectations, has been a continual undercurrent throughout this thesis. Not least because it can be considered, as he later suggested, 'a fascinating problem and I think it's one that theatre has the potential to really unpick and destroy'. Such points about the inherently creative potential of disability and impairment are reminiscent of Rachel Bagshaw's (D) earlier comment that 'theatre should be the perfect medium to kind of reimagine' and Chapter Four's discussion of *Touretteshero's* production of *Not I*. They are relevant here in connecting Rachel Denning's (P) desire (and answer) to that of Fran Mills (P), who also has achondroplasia. When asked about *her* sense of responsibility as a performer, Fran said:

What I strive for in a rehearsal room and a performance environment is representing myself naturally, I never want it to be a, "Ooh, we've got to do this, ooh we've got to make it special", like it's just a, like if someone went "Ooh can I have some Blu Tack?", it's the same as "Ooh, can I have a step?", do you know what I mean? That it's not like, "Oh, I'm so sorry, we forgot your step" because if you asked for Blu Tack nobody would be like [puts on exaggerated RP accent] "I am so sorry that we don't have Blu Tack in this room" [...] I guess I downplay it a lot, if it's really obvious that I can't reach something, I won't be like, "I can't do that", I would be like, "Ooh, is there any chance of a step?", do you know what I mean?

This is interesting on a number of levels. Firstly, it offers a very clear example of the sort of scenario David references – and the different ways it is possible to navigate them. Fran’s use of humour, even during our conversation, might be considered as a coping mechanism to moderate or mask her emotional response. Indeed, she acknowledges this herself, through the statement ‘I guess I downplay it a lot’. However, later in our interview, she also said, ‘other people might deal with it differently and that’s fine’, suggesting her strategy is evidence of a more general personality trait rather than specific to situations involving her disability. She made this point explicitly in relation to *creative* decisions, saying ‘[a]ll my choices come from “Fran”, not my disability’. This echoes Rachel’s desire to ‘get back to’ being ‘a professional actor’ – but it also raises a second important observation about Fran’s own earlier statement. In comparing the step she needs for a variety of activities in rehearsals or performance to a request for Blu Tack, she underscored the ways in which the relative ubiquity of certain requirements means that they are understood as mundane and therefore made readily available. This is similar to the observations of Edward Kemp (D, DS) in Chapter Five, about the prevalence of dyslexia among performers. Whilst there is an important distinction to be drawn between resource issues and those based in attitudes, Fran’s point gives credence, both to the elements of disability which are socially constructed and to the essential presence of impairment in the human condition proposed by Shakespeare (2014) and Mounsey (2014).

It thereby relates back to Rachel Denning’s (P) perspective on *her* career – and consequently to the dual opportunity provided by her *CtM* episode for recruitment and representation. In cognisance of the fact that ‘[h]istorically, people with dwarfism have worked in entertainment within Circus, Freak Shows and other forms of “entertainment” with negative connotations’ and that ‘[t]here is still a “tail end” of this sort of work within the entertainment industry at the moment’, she told me:

I do feel a responsibility as a disabled performer to take on “ordinary” roles with real, human stories and to play them as well as I can. I don’t want these parts to just tick a box, but because I was the best actor suited to the role.

Whilst the part of Penny Reed was specifically related to Rachel’s own experience of achondroplasia, her character’s trajectory positions her as one of these “ordinary” roles

with real, human stories'. This statement is supported by three short scenes from different points across her storyline, set out in chronological order below:

PATSY: Mrs Reed, we have your notes from Dr Treneman. We know you understand the risks associated with your pregnancy. All I want is to be able to help with what may lie ahead.

PENNY: I wanted this baby for so long. No-one even thought I'd be able to fall, never mind carry. They were wrong, Nurse. Why can't they be wrong now?

PATSY: I so very, very much hope that they are. But I have a duty to care for you as much as for baby, and part of that's trying to prepare you.

PENNY: I can feel my baby. He kicks and wriggles when we sing to him. He's my little miracle, Nurse. Don't ask me to give up, because I won't. I can't.

PATSY: Midwife calling. [PENNY hides the babyclothes she has been sewing] Mrs Reed, how are we today?

PENNY: Oh, you know, still breathless, and I feel ever so big now.

PATSY: I'll make us coffee, and while I do, I'd like you to look through these. A little light reading. We recommend it for all our mothers-to-be. [Passes pamphlets to PENNY]

PENNY: But, Nurse Mount, you made it sound as if I shouldn't hope.

PATSY: We can offer no promises. Nothing to outweigh those with greater knowledge, but at this moment, you're an expectant mother. I think in all my talk of duty, perhaps I forgot to speak of joy.

PENNY: It's like a jumping bean. I call it the morning shuffle.

PATSY: Are you sure you're managing? Your lungs are probably quite restricted by now.

PENNY: Mmm, I'm breathless, all right.

PATSY: We can ask for a home help.

PENNY: I got Derek. He's a whizz in a pinny.

PATSY [chuckles]: Well don't be brave and struggle on.

PENNY: It's no struggle, Nurse. Not this little miracle.

DEREK [enters bedroom]: How's our patient?

PATSY: Your wife is a model mother-to-be. Would you like to hear baby?

These three scenes are quoted in succession to illustrate how the episode's interwoven narrative threads allow for a subtle transition in perspective from a focus on Penny's 'predicament' (Shakespeare 2014) to her impending motherhood. In following the joint journey of Penny and her assigned midwife Patsy – who, as is shown through both her own dialogue and Penny's responses to it, began by being cautious if not outright worried – the audience is encouraged to explore the possibility of making a similar shift themselves. This was a very important aspect of the character's storyline for Rachel, who said

I haven't had a baby or had an experience of being pregnant – but I definitely want children and I know that when I do, I will be determined to enjoy the experience as much as possible and will expect to be allowed to “just be a mother”

The significance of being part of a certain type of representation as a disabled performer is revisited in the third section of this chapter. Here, it is of interest as it recalls McGann's (2015) concept of the distinction between, and combination of, accuracy and authenticity in the context of a period drama. For, whilst Penny's positivity around her pregnancy is certainly emphasised, there is also evident anxiety in keeping with medical knowledge from the period. Two examples of communication between colleagues illustrate their sense of inadequacy about their own understanding:

PATRICK: But pregnancy for a woman with achondroplasia is quite risky. How can Mrs Reed not be aware of that?

PATSY: I don't know, Doctor. But she's definitely been booked in for a caesarean, so... Well, someone must've discussed the potential problems of a vaginal birth.

PATRICK: The size of the pelvis is an obvious one, but there are others, and she should be aware of them.

PATSY: It's normally wonderful seeing a mother brimming over with excitement. In this case, it unsettles me.

PATRICK: Let me do a bit of digging. Once we've seen the notes, we'll know what she knows, and then we can work out the best way to help.

PATSY: All right.

PATRICK: I can't say the situation doesn't worry me. Both parents are dwarfs, so there's a high chance this baby will be born with the same condition.

PATSY: It could still be healthy. And it would be so loved.

PATRICK: I know. And if the genetics work out differently, it could actually be of normal size.

SISTER JULIENNE: Really?

PATRICK: Well, it's possible. But, it's also possible the baby will be stillborn, or only live for hours. And we have no way of knowing which way the dice will fall.

SISTER JULIENNE: In which case, we must prepare Mrs Reed for every scenario, even the saddest.

PATSY: I'll do that. I have to. But she's so happy. The thought of anything going wrong will break her heart.

PATRICK: She already knows. Her previous GP told her. He *also* told her that she should terminate the pregnancy.

These extracts are very much in keeping with the period, and also the medical model of disability. Nevertheless, they simultaneously educate the audience about changes in

comprehension of achondroplasia and signal that certain aspects may have remained the same. This was a continuing thread throughout Rachel's contribution. She felt the balance of the episode was correct, and said:

It still is extremely risky for a mother with achondroplasia to give birth naturally, she will always give birth through caesarean section. There is a 25% chance a baby will inherit "double dominance" [an occurrence of two dwarfism genes] if both parents have achondroplasia – if double dominance is inherited the baby will not likely survive pregnancy, if it does, it will only survive a few months. An area that still needs and I hope gets a lot more research. There is a 50% chance that the child will have dwarfism and 25% that the child will be of average height – these statistics were not known or understood in the 1960s.

The work of Hannah Hamad (2016) supports this juxtaposition of current understanding with that of the period, and the consequent possibility that depiction of the past might also have tangible impact in the present. Hamad analyses medical drama in the context of the ongoing NHS crisis of this past decade. She states that '[m]edics have long occupied the centre of attention in mediating healthcare professions, but with nursing and midwifery evermore [sic] prevalent in media imagery and popular discourse, they increasingly constitute the public face of this culture war' (2016 142). Moreover, in terms of Rachel's personal hope for more research around double dominance, the show's potential to galvanise its modern audience has been proven multiple times, most recently through evidence of a 46% rise in blood donor registration during the airing of 8.2, which dealt with sickle cell anaemia (cf. Freeman-Powell 2019; Carr 2019).

To return to 6.2, though, aside from the representation of varied *practitioner* responses, it offers additional representation of differing reactions from the perspectives of patients and their families. This is provided most obviously through the character of Derek Reed (Penny's husband, portrayed by Dean Whatton, who also has achondroplasia). Yet it is also evident in the episode's concurrent plotline featuring dock worker George Marsh and his wife, Jessie. Jessie (portrayed by Erin Doherty) is mid-labour when an explosion at the docks leaves George (Daniel Kendrick) with severe

burns and eventually confirmed blindness. I do not focus on their story here, since the arc of Delia's character discussed in the previous section allows for more detailed analysis of the ramifications, and representation, of acquired impairment. It is nevertheless important to note because it highlights the difference between mothers' and fathers' responses to perceived difficulty. With regards to Penny and Derek, this is especially evident in the scene below, which follows Penny's first interaction with a group of fellow expectant mothers:

PENNY: They were such a lovely bunch, Derek. I'd so love to have 'em here one day. Perhaps for a coffee morning. Probably wouldn't wanna come, would they? It would be a trek for them. You're not finishing the pram first?

DEREK: The pram doesn't earn me money, repairing the clock does.

PENNY: Derek, we need the pram ready.

DEREK: No, we don't. We're in cloud cuckoo land. I'm scared if you go into that hospital, then you won't come out, neither of you.

This scene is interesting in representational terms because it shows that shared experience of disability and impairment does not always equate to a similar outlook or prospect – a point explicitly returned to by Rachel at the end of this section. Additionally, however, it has a bearing on casting because of the split between performers and characters. This is particularly true for performers' relationships to roles which might impact their personal identity and wellbeing, as well as the multiple senses of responsibility discussed at the start of this section. Rachel raised this, observing a distinction which reflects Kate Lamb's (P) around her frustration towards Delia, and which might be phrased as performance versus participation in a scene. Rachel said:

In general, I'm pretty good at "keeping a little bit of me", I like to think I have a little piece of me that I put a wall around and that is protected from everything external. Some jobs are harder than others to do this. Especially when it is something that directly affects you, such as *Call the Midwife*. Of course, I am going to be affected by the storyline and the character's journey – but it is important to remain focussed on the character and the truth of the character – it's not about

me. Sometimes we get emotionally involved and begin to “comment” on a scene as a “member of the audience” where we are not the audience, we are the person. For example, if we take a scene from *Call the Midwife*, I could have got upset thinking “oh poor Penny, her baby is probably going to die and all these doctors are treating her like a specimen” but that would be a view as an audience. Penny would not be thinking this, she was thinking “my baby is going to be fine, I will be fine”

Her answer in this instance was telling because it evoked two theoretical concepts relating to disability and performance discussed in Chapter Two – Bree Hadley’s (2014) assertion of the inherent performativity of visibly disabled bodies, alongside Petra Kuppers’ (2017) suggestion that this is the precise reason we are not considered able to put on shows. At the same time, Rachel’s answer acknowledged the frequent conflation of performers with their characters observed by David Graver (1997) regardless of disability. That she understood these conflicting forces recalls David Bellwood’s (AM) articulation of the ‘anything at work’ above, which complicates the rehearsal process for disabled performers.

However, to revisit the placement of the stepladder in Penny’s first significant scene with Patsy at the Clinic, these factors seem to be mitigated by the commitment of the *CtM* creative team to representing visible accessibility and assistance. Moreover, this claim could be extended beyond disability-specific representation, through combining a comment of Rachel’s with the academic-creative commentary of Stephen McGann (2015). McGann reinforces his distinction between accuracy and authenticity with the statement that ‘[i]n a sense, we delegate procedural detail to the writer and experts, so that we can focus on the bigger picture: making the medic we play not simply accurate, but, in the widest human sense, authentic’ (2015 124). This is striking in its similarity to Rachel’s perspective on her process in preparing to play Penny, which embodied the subtitle of this chapter in privileging the mother over the medical curiosity. She said

I did some research, and obviously had what was in the script about the medical aspects and complications of having a baby in the 1960s – however, I tried not to

think about these too much. For my portrayal of Penny, it was more important that I focussed on her and her journey on becoming a mother.

As suggested in discussing the scenes so far, this is a balance the episode as a whole aims to strike. The potential conflict between the two perspectives (which would perhaps today be framed as the medical versus the social model) is a constant, if covert, presence. It is brought out more overtly once Penny is admitted to hospital when her waters break early. Her rushed admission is made additionally traumatic by the presence of several medical students being addressed by her consultant, Mr Simkins, in the following exchange:

SIMKINS: This woman is a primagravida with achondroplasia. Pelvic abnormalities bar a vaginal delivery, thus a caesarean section is necessary. Labour has begun at thirty-seven weeks; therefore we must proceed immediately and get her to theatre. Bring her in.

[SIMKINS and students leave]

DELIA: I'm sorry about that, Mrs Reed. I'll be with you, in the operating theatre.

PATSY [enters hurriedly]: Mrs Reed?

DELIA: You only have a moment.

PENNY: I don't want to lose my baby.

PATSY: Everyone will do all they can for you and baby.

PENNY: I haven't got my case, it was all so quick. The midwife said they'd telephone Derek but he isn't here.

PATSY: Leave it all with me.

The contrast between Mr Simkins' attitude and that of Delia (there in her capacity as a midwifery trainee) and Patsy (still Penny's assigned midwife, despite the medically-necessary hospital delivery) is stark. It shows how attitudes towards disability and impairment can differ or be fluid, even within the same period, and consequently foregrounds yet again the significance of Mounsey's (2014) concept of variability in analytical approaches towards them. Moreover, if the ideas of compulsory

heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness/mindedness (Rich 1980, 1986; McRuer 2006; Kafer 2013) are considered alongside variability, it might also illustrate a sort of minority group solidarity on the part of the nurses. The second possibility is explored below, in relation to two scenes after Penny's labour, but the first was brought up by Rachel Denning (P) who explained why she called her time working on *CtM* 'fascinating and humbling':

I was so fascinated at looking back – not that long! – on how much medical science and understanding of disability has altered, and also humbled, as this wasn't long ago and we worked alongside a woman who also has achondroplasia and had a child in the 60s, so it was great to get to know her and her story when thinking about Penny. Having said that, a lot hasn't changed – when I was a baby I was used as part of a medical talk – placed on a table as doctors “performed” a lecture on my disability and pointed and showed my body. But a lot of that, I think, is the medical industry in general.

Rachel's last sentence, ascribing such behaviour to 'the medical industry in general', emphasises her awareness of the pervasiveness of the medical model across multiple historical periods. However, her reference to her personal, and modern, experience of being 'placed on a table as doctors “performed” a lecture on [her] disability and pointed and showed [her] body' is additionally evocative of the ubiquity of performance in visibly disabled people's lives (Hadley 2014). The significance of a role like Penny Reed could therefore be extended beyond her representational impact as a character for *other people* (being an example of a disabled professional woman and mother). It could also be situated as an opportunity for *Rachel* to assert her autonomy, both professionally as a performer and personally over her own body. This potentially positive harnessing of concepts such as 'physical capital' (Haynes 2008, 2012) and the 'aesthetic labour' undertaken by performers (cf. Dean [2005] in relation to gender) within the specific context of disability was discussed in Chapter Two, and again in Chapter Four alongside comments by Jamie Beddard (P, W, D). Here, however, it is noticeable in the way Penny's previous positivity slips slightly in the aftermath of her baby's birth – by which point in the episode her fellow characters as well as the audience have been convinced of her capability. She is therefore able to admit to

vulnerability, on her own terms. This is shown in two scenes on the maternity ward, as follows:

PATSY: Mrs Reed, you have a daughter. Yes. Yes, Penny, your baby is well.

PENNY: But, but they said she'd suffer.

PATSY: No, no, Penny, she's... Forgive the term, she's normal sized.

PENNY: Don't you mean big?

[CUT-SCENE to DELIA telling DEREK the good news, then back to PATSY and PENNY]

PENNY: What if we can't manage her? What if she can't bear that we're dwarves?

PATSY: Mrs Reed, I'm not a mother, but I know what it is to be a child and to be afraid. I grew up in a prisoner of war camp, you see.

PENNY: I can't. I can't hold her, my arms are too short.

PATSY: You've carried this baby for nine months, you can hold her now.

DELIA [passing the baby over]: That's it, you have her safe. You have her.

PENNY: Oh, my. Oh, my. Where did you come from? So perfect.

JUNIOR DOCTOR [with medical students]: Nurse, we're observing Mrs Reed. [To students] Mr Simkins delivered baby yesterday –

DELIA: Not today. Mrs Reed is not a specimen, she's a mother. Let her have this moment in private.

The surety of both nurses' statements exhibits their professionalism but also their *personal* willingness to go beyond that to reinforce Penny's confidence. This showcases the potential solidarity mentioned earlier, and I asked both Kate Lamb (P) and Rachel Denning (P) about, having noticed throughout Series Four, Five and Six that many of Delia and Patsy's significant episodes as a couple coincide with storylines about disability. Kate was intrigued by this and, whilst unsure it was a deliberate strategy, said

I certainly think the experience of being “outside the norm” creates an empathy in Delia and, to a greater extent, Patsy, which is perhaps revealed in their ability to see beyond disabilities where maybe others can't.

Rachel had a similar response, saying, '[t]hose in “minority” groups have one thing in common and I think it brings minority groups together'. Her words in particular are striking in their reflection of Iris Marion Young's (1990) assertion that marginalised groups come together through shared experience of difference rather than similarity. This brief representational conjecture about these characters' implicit identities merely highlights yet another example of the threads connecting patients' shorter arcs with practitioners' longer ones. Returning to Rachel's autonomy as a *performer*, though, the second of the two scenes features an especially emphatic assertion of this. In the moment when Kate (as Delia) passes over the newborn baby for Rachel (as Penny) to hold, this physical foregrounding of the actors' working body or 'body of flesh' (Graver 1997 230-231) underscores their trust in each other as an ensemble as much as characters. For, if Delia and Patsy believe that Penny can hold a baby, it necessarily follows that Kate Lamb and Emerald Fennell believe Rachel Denning can too. Here, in a much more emotive example than the placement of the stepladder with which the section began, the interplay of representation and recruitment is crystallised in a scene showcasing the synchronicity of a performer's real labour processes with the fictional actions of her character.

Such moments can also serve as incredibly important and useful signs of the *split* between performers and their characters. Both these possibilities are explored in the next section, through discussion with Colin Young (P) about his two episodes, but the split was also raised by Rachel:

Whatever character I play, that character has achondroplasia – that is the fact of me playing that part – but what will change and need to be explored is their personal relationship to this... 'are they proud?', 'are they angry?' How do they respond to others and how do others respond to me? Just because the character has the same condition does not necessarily mean that they connect or understand it in the same way.

I have argued that this reminder is reflected in the arc of this episode, the parallel journeys of Penny and Rachel, and that of the audience alongside them. The intertwined threads of the fictional narrative presented and the *working realities* navigated throughout its portrayal, as well as the additional presence of other disabled characters and performers in the same episode, seem to offer the opportunity for multiple perspectives on this ‘mother of the week’ plotline. These are informed by, but not reduced to, her ‘condition’ (to use Rachel’s phrase). Following the discussion of the complex social forces depicted alongside Delia’s traumatic brain injury, this later example of multifaceted treatment of a character’s experiences in 6.2 might be ascribed to the episode’s temporal positioning in 1963, and consequently as concurrent to wider socio-political shifts. However, the final section of this chapter examines the trajectory of a character featured in two (much earlier) episodes. I suggest that such representation actually signifies the ethos behind the realities of the show’s production instead of its fictional environment, and the way depiction of the past is simultaneously mediated by, and can impact on, perceived possibilities for representation and recruitment in the present.

*‘And if she is loved, I can go on living’ – Jacob Milligan as a positive example of a disabled father and partner*

The previous section focussed on a character dealing with a potentially problematic pregnancy resulting in a positive outcome largely unexpected in the show’s era. This section centres on a plotline which, in many ways, depicts a more expected dynamic across its two relevant episodes: 2.4 and 3.5. The dynamic involves a disabled character living in a residential home (in 2.4) and his later relationship with a fellow resident (in 3.5) along with its associated medical and social complexities. It therefore allows a shift from a more detailed analysis of a mother’s perspective to that of a father’s. This consequently connects to an observation made about 6.2, and the positioning of Dean Whatton in the role of Derek Reed, and of Daniel Kendrick in the role of George Marsh. As discussed, these two characters highlight how much the perspective of fathers comes to be considered as the show progresses, especially in storylines connected to disability. The two episodes addressed in this section illustrate that this propensity was evident

from much earlier on, since they are from Series Two and Three respectively. When we first meet the father, Jacob Milligan, it is not in fact as a father at all. Rather Jacob (Colin Young [P]) is presented simply as a “patient” at St Gideon’s, a home for disabled children and young adults at a short distance from Poplar. The substance of his storyline in 2.4 is to act as a marker for the father from another family, the Roberts, who are exploring options for the future of their son, recently born with Spina Bifida and consequent hydrocephalus. This is most overtly displayed in a scene towards the end of 2.4, where Jacob serves tea:

MRS PEACOCK: We would ask that the parents visit as often as possible. The bond needn’t be broken just because the baby’s at St Gideon’s.

JENNY: Mr Roberts, did you hear?

DOUGLAS [looking over at JACOB sorting tea]: What happened to him?

MRS PEACOCK: He was born that way.

DOUGLAS: Why?

MRS PEACOCK: It happens. Approximately one in a thousand babies are born like Jacob there. Or like your child.

DOUGLAS: A thousand to one? Should’ve had money on it.

MRS PEACOCK: Thank you, Martin. And Jacob.

JACOB: It’s not poisoned.

DOUGLAS: What’s it like here?

JACOB: There’s a biscuit factory next door.

DOUGLAS: Nice.

JACOB: We get the broken ones.

The tea-making aspects of this interaction are revisited later, in relation to their practicalities. Its further relevance here, beyond fatherhood, is that it exhibits a meshing

of period and modern perspectives similar to that put across throughout 6.2 in the plotline of Penny Reed – again almost two series earlier. As Courtney Wilder phrases it:

Jacob recognizes that the institution where he lives embodies a harmful construct of disability as requiring segregation; the social practice of removing people with disabilities from their homes is breaking the relationships and causing damage to the residents. Even this particular institution, which attempts to maintain family ties, does not provide a real home for the residents who have been displaced from their homes. (2017 14)

Before discussing the representational significance of Jacob's character further, though, it is important to acknowledge this in terms of recruitment. Just as he ultimately offers Douglas Roberts a reason to keep his son at home, Jacob offered Colin Young (P), a much-needed job. When asked about his journey as a performer, having mentioned beginning to be interested in drama whilst attending a modern 'special' school and college in many ways very comparable to St Gideon's, he went on to say:

I signed up with Louise [Dyson, from agency VisABLE People] and had one or two modelling gigs but not much for about eight years, and then the week I was leaving London, she rang me up and said "do you want audition for *Call the Midwife*?" so I was like, "Yeah, okay." I didn't know what it was at that point, so I just went for it, and got the part in Series Two.

Consequently, Jacob provided Colin with his television debut and allowed for the continuation of his career, through the opportunity of a second episode. As Colin put it, 'I got the call the next year for the episode with Sarah Gordy and that was the big one'. The specifics of this 'big one' (which *The Mirror* termed the show's 'most controversial storyline yet' [Pryer 2014]) are elaborated on below, but some more general elements are of interest first. For instance, even in Colin's answers to the preliminary questions asked of every performer participant (about the types of roles they have been offered and how they are perceived as performers), *CtM* had a prominent place. This was in part due to its transformative effect on his career and his sense of self. Writing a blog for UK disability charity Scope, Colin stated that it 'gave [him] the sense of being an actor in [his] own right' (Young 2014). However the reasons were more complex than that. In a manner which links this chapter back to the analysis of *Wicked*, it showed how his

'typing' had moved from being cast as Tiny Tim in university productions of *A Christmas Carol* to a kind more in parallel with his non-disabled counterparts. Indeed, where I might have expected his response regarding his sense of identity as a performer immediately to reference his impairment, in line with the majority of answers from other disabled interviewees, Colin instead began by saying:

It's weird because I do think – the roles I've had so far in *The Dumping Ground* and *Call the Midwife* I've played an absent father so I'm not quite sure what that says about me but that wasn't a role that I thought I would have.

The comparison with *non-disabled* participants' responses is founded on the fact that similar sentiments were evident in a reply to the same question given by a non-disabled female performer interviewee. She said:

I often feel that the characters I play are quieter and more fragile than I am, perhaps that's a reflection on writing female characters, perhaps my face is too soft, perhaps my body is too...? It's hard not to speculate on why you are seen for certain characters and not for others but certainly if your show-reel consists of weeping, nervous or quiet characters, casting directors might reasonably extrapolate that that's what you're good at.

There is an additionally gendered dimension to this response, carefully couched in the trailing rhetorical question punctuated by a triple use of 'perhaps', in line with experiences documented by Dean (2005, 2007) as well as with those of another non-disabled female participant who, following our interview, thanked me for the 'opportunity to get passionate about feminism'. I do not discount this important element. It is simply interesting in the context of Colin's comments because it highlights how much can be encompassed by Dean's related observation of 'the idea that gatekeepers formally trade in stereotypes, even if indirectly' (2005 767), and that this tendency is not necessarily specific to any particular social group. Indeed Colin himself acknowledged the generality of the struggle for work:

It is a really tough one because there's an ego to acting and everyone wants to be an actor and acting's so hard because there's so many people out there, there's such a big talent pool

Nevertheless, the continuation of this thought returned to the specificity of the disabled experience, because he added:

but when you look at disabled acting, there isn't a massive talent pool, but there aren't the parts, so you would think that if you increase the parts you increase the talent pool. It doesn't seem to be working like that, though. I don't think you can draw a comparison between disabled and non-disabled actors, because if you make it as a disabled actor it's obviously because you're good – or because you fill a need – whereas if you're a non-disabled actor there's a dime a dozen.

The idea that 'if you make it as a disabled actor it's obviously because you're good – or because you fill a need' evokes two almost opposite concepts, but that paradox is a pertinent one because it was a recurring theme among participants. Within the context of *CtM*, it relates to Rachel Denning's (P) desire to be considered primarily as a professional actor, as well as questions around the representation of different kinds of impairments and disclosure, as discussed alongside the storyline of Delia's bicycle accident. On a wider scale, it also connects back to the politicisation of disabled identity explored in conjunction with *Wicked*, and is especially interesting in cognisance of comments made by participants who reject the associated labels. Here, though, the paradox might be framed slightly differently as a 'double-bind' – because, in either case, the implicit requirement for the performer is very specific. If 'you fill a need' it is to represent a particular impairment authentically, which carries with it a great deal of responsibility. If it is considered that 'you're good', there will be a parallel expectation that you carry the show and are responsible for its success. Something similar was suggested by David Bellwood (AM) who told me of an audience member's confusion that one of the Deaf performers at the Globe had not been given a 'main' part in his particular production. This performer, David said,

was quite fresh out of training and he had a relatively, you know, he had a part with lines and so forth and I said "well this is going to be a problem if we can't have disabled people in small parts as well". We have to, we can't just assign a certain word count to disabled people and say well anything under this is tokenism and anything above this is too [much].

Such a contradictory conundrum echoes comments made by Lyn Gardner in a recent article for *The Stage*. Writing on the concept of failure in theatre, Gardner states:

I believe the very same people – artists from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, artists of colour, disabled artists – who find it hardest to get opportunities in the first place are also the least likely to get the chance to fail upwards. [...] the individual is often perceived to bear the burden of being representative of all playwrights of colour or disabled artists. If they are seen to fail, they are not only failing for themselves but for all under-represented artists. (2018 n.p.)

The idea of failing upwards is reminiscent of the oft-cited passage from Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho* (1983), 'All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.' Consequently, it, and its linguistic links to disability through the original narrator's references to their 'crippled hands' (Beckett 2009 [1983] 81), most obviously connect to Chapter Four's analysis of Touretteshero's *Not I*. Yet they are also relevant in cognisance of Colin's comments above – especially those positioning the role of Jacob as that which allowed him to continue his career – because failing of any kind requires being given the initial opportunity to try. Additionally, the anecdote given by David Bellwood (AM), evoking the hierarchy of perceived sizes of roles when it comes to 'proper representation', suggests it was pity on the part of the audience member which prompted them to complain. It thereby reflects another point from Colin, who suggested:

disabled actors still feel pitied in performances. I feel that does seem to happen. We've moved away from the disabled person playing the villain to the disabled person inspiring some kind of compassion or charity or – not charity in the traditional sense but – like, people connecting on a personal level but in a kind of woe is me kind of way.

Colin's observations make an explicit connection between recruitment ('disabled *actors* still feel pitied in performances' [my emphasis]) and representation ('moved away from the disabled person *playing* the villain to the disabled person *inspiring* some kind of compassion or charity'). The distinction invoked between performer and character in

the second half of his statement thereby allows the discussion to segue back to the specific representational qualities of the role of Jacob. Colin went on to say:

the parts I've had are quite meaty, so they've had depth to them but I think they're still separate to the mainstream sense of characterisation. Like, for example, both my onscreen partners have also been disabled so it kind of suits the mainstream idea that disabled people only date other disabled people. So yeah, the parts that I've gone for and been successful for have also been, yeah, not very – what's the word – they haven't been a very independent storyline, it's always been the subtitle of the people's story.

This might appear to be a negative observation in that it bears a similarity to feminist writing on the male gaze (cf. Mulvey 1975). Yet Colin's point was merely to raise a comparison between the period context of *CtM* and the modern one of his other prominent role thus far, in CBBC's *The Dumping Ground*, to illustrate that the same principles are applied to many roles related to disability, regardless of era. However, in the case of Jacob and *CtM* (and especially his later storyline in 5.3), the representation of disabled people having a romantic relationship at all in the show's circumstances was groundbreaking, and appreciated and applauded by Colin himself. Alongside the approbation he expressed during our interview, discussed in more detail later, in the Scope blog, he wrote, '[f]or me it's highlighted an aspect of our social history that has not had the recognition it deserves: disabled people in love'. This connects to my foregrounding of the significant representation provided by Patsy and Delia's relationship, alongside less visible impairment.

Colin also writes, 'I believe the courage shown by Call The Midwife [*sic*] will encourage writers and agents to include disabled people in their programmes' (Young 2014). I would extend this latter statement to suggest that the combined significance of Jacob in terms of both representation and recruitment is found before there is even vague evidence of his relationship, and that it actually arises from an episode a whole series earlier (2.4) with the introduction of his character (and consequently Colin as a performer). Alongside efforts to support the Roberts family with their newborn son's spina bifida diagnosis, the Nonnatus House ensemble donates clothing to St Gideon's. Sister Julianne asks Jenny Lee (the midwife assigned to the Roberts family) to travel

over to the home with her colleague, Jane Sutton. There they meet Jacob. The following exchange, quoted in full for easy reference, reveals important information, not just about Jacob, but about Jenny and Jane:

JACOB: Can you stay for a cup of tea?

JENNY: I'm terribly sorry...

MRS PEACOCK: Cup of tea.

JENNY: Oh. No, thank you, we must be leaving soon.

JACOB: Hello, Jane. You are looking very well.

JANE: Hello, Jacob.

MRS PEACOCK: Away with you, Jacob. I thought I was the only girl for you.

[The women move on]

JENNY: Sorry I couldn't understand.

MRS PEACOCK: Oh, it comes with time, but don't let it fool you. He's as bright as a button and as cheeky as a monkey.

JENNY: I have a family at the moment. I imagine their child would do well here.

MRS PEACOCK: Let me make it very clear, Nurse. This is a home by name only. It is not "home". If the child can stay with its family, I suggest you do everything in your power to make that happen.

JENNY: Yes.

MRS PEACOCK: It's lovely to see you again, Jane. Still a chatterbox, then.

[Chuckles, leaves]

JENNY: Did you used to work here, then, Jane?

JANE: I was a patient. And then I became a trustee. I met Sister Julianne here. She's been very kind to me.

JENNY: I won't say anything to the others. Jane, would you say this is an adequate place for a child to grow up?

JANE: They would do their best.

This scene is significant, not just to the discussion in this section, but to this chapter as a whole. It relates back to questions about what constitutes disability representation, as well as disclosure. Moreover, it exhibits the more nuanced understanding of, and approach to, these issues emphasised throughout the analysis of the show. This is in part due to its presentation of multiple kinds of impairments in a single episode. Such strategies have been mentioned in reference to each of the other arcs under discussion but this episode (2.4) is especially interesting. Aside from its much earlier placement in the entire show, which once again illustrates the longevity of the production team's commitment to inclusive practice, it also features a mental health condition, firmly situated under the umbrella of disability (albeit unspecified in its diagnosis, much like Delia's traumatic brain injury in 4.8). Furthermore, rather than this additional representation merely being a concurrent storyline to Jacob's (like that of the Roberts' baby) it actually has a discernible impact on his character's trajectory. This was a difference for which Colin, from a performer's perspective, was very grateful. Raising the subject himself during our interview, he said:

I think what was good about that was the fact that, um, the other nurse [Jane] had also been in St Gideon's as a kid so you kind of had that sense of, "Oh, she's a midwife [*sic*] and she's gone from that environment then Jacob was obviously able to be a similar level of capable as well", so that was an interesting parallel.

Colin's comments on the *representational* example that Jane in particular offers Jacob link back to recruitment and casting, into which, as shown in the first section of this chapter, he had put some very thorough thought. When asked specifically about conventions surrounding disability casting, he first framed part of his answer around his personal experience of auditioning:

I think so long as I'm presenting a character with the same impairment it's fine. I think if I was asked to become more disabled, or represent my disability in a way that isn't true, that would worry me. Like I've been put forward for parts where

the character has a learning impairment and I'm a bit, I cringe a bit at that because I don't have a learning impairment.

This confusion arises from the fact that Cerebral Palsy results from a brain injury. It is therefore frequently conflated with cognitive impairment, or, as Colin phrased it, 'a learning impairment', especially where there the brain injury affects speech. Whilst it is important to note that Cerebral Palsy and cognitive impairments are not mutually exclusive (and in fact, depending on the area of the brain injured, the latter *can* be a symptom of the former), the idea that they *always* coexist is not merely problematic but inaccurate. This assumption is directly addressed by a section of the scene from 2.4 quoted above:

JENNY: Sorry I couldn't understand.

MRS PEACOCK: Oh, it comes with time, but don't let it fool you. He's as bright as a button and as cheeky as a monkey.

Jenny's reference to Jacob's speech is dealt with in more detail shortly. For now it offers a useful point of parallel between Colin's comments on casting in this section, and those cited in my analysis of Delia's traumatic brain injury. There, I quoted him saying, '[a]s much as I would like to, I could never play a non-disabled person, so I think it's only right that if someone is portraying degeneration they should start as non-disabled' – and his speech was one of the reasons which led him to make the concession in the first premise of his argument. Equally, however, his reticence to play a character with what he termed 'a learning impairment' illustrates an understanding that the ethical dilemmas concerning the concept of 'cripping up' do not only apply to non-disabled performers. It also highlights a lack of comprehension on the part of some casting directors regarding both the heterogeneity of the disability experience and the *specificity* of certain impairments. These points were raised by Lisa Mallaghan (Pr), Producer at Mind the Gap, the UK's longest-established learning disabled-led theatre company and associated training programme, and Paul Wilshaw (P), one of the Mind the Gap artists. Lisa told me she actually gets repeated requests for actors 'with a learning disability, but when I ask them to be more specific (i.e. do you want an actor with Down's Syndrome, or Williams' Syndrome, or a non-visible learning disability, etc.) they don't know what to say. They just haven't thought about it.' Simultaneously, Paul

mentioned the number of times he has been told ‘Oh, but you don’t look disabled!’ and indeed wrote an article about his experiences for Disability Arts Online (2017) under this title, with the addition of ‘the thorny issue of visible impairments taking centre stage’. These anecdotes arose despite Paul actually having what he called ‘mild’ Cerebral Palsy, which affects him physically as well as cognitively, although he felt his cognitive impairment was more pertinent in his practice.

This variety of experience and expression even under the umbrella of what is ostensibly the same impairment (Cerebral Palsy), and the intersection of *performer’s* impairments with those of the characters they portray, relates once again to Colin’s thoughts on casting. He added, during our interview, ‘I think obviously it’s good that disabled people are playing disabled parts but the representation of what non-disabled directors and producers and casting directors think is disabled can be quite different to the truth’. It thereby aptly returns the discussion to *CtM* and the dual opportunity for representation and recruitment offered by the role of Jacob. For, whereas Paul Wilshaw (P) is read most obviously by others as having a cognitive or learning impairment, Colin Young (P) felt people considered his *speech* impairment to be the most prevalent part of his Cerebral Palsy – and therefore his potential as a performer. As shown above, these tendencies are exhibited in people’s interactions with the character of Jacob from the moment he is introduced, and continue throughout 2.4 and 3.5. However, a range of responses is depicted (including some progression in understanding), as exemplified in the two scene extracts below. The first is from 2.4, when Jenny pays another visit to St Gideon’s, this time with Douglas Roberts who is sporting a black eye following a drunken brawl with some Teddy Boys:

JENNY: Hello again, Jacob.

JACOB: Hello. She’s waiting for you.

JENNY: Thank you.

JACOB: Did you have a fight with King Kong?

DOUGLAS: What did he say?

JENNY: Say it again please, Jacob.

JACOB: Did you have a fight with King Kong?

DOUGLAS [smiling and laughing]: Oh! No, mate, just half a dozen little monkeys.

The second is from 3.5, and takes place on Jacob's long bus journey from St Gideon's to his girlfriend Sally's house in Poplar. He has this brief exchange with the conductor:

CONDUCTOR: Fares?

JACOB: I want to go to Dulaike Street, Poplar, please.

CONDUCTOR: Sorry, mate?

JACOB: Dulaike Street, Poplar. It's on the paper.

CONDUCTOR [after reading address]: Ninepence. And you need to get off at the Town Hall.

The importance of the latter example is perhaps not evident on its own, except for its representation of a successful (if convoluted) interaction in wider society. Nevertheless, it is referenced here for the sake of contrast – because, the moment Jacob gets off the bus, he asks a local woman for more specific directions. She understands him immediately and provides them without hesitation. This underscores the nuance behind means of communication which might at first be regarded as complex, because it shows that a previous interaction is not always necessary to enable accurate comprehension. This assertion is supported by the fact that, despite having many mutual connections in the performance world, Colin and I had never met in person. Yet we were able to conduct a successful FaceTime interview, and the only issues with communication were mutual when the internet connection occasionally lagged. Indeed he made a point of such disparities of understanding in relation to the publicity around his episodes, especially 3.5. He told me, '[i]t was quite interesting when I did *This Morning* talking about *Call the Midwife* [with his principal co-star for the episode, Sarah Gordy], a lot of the comments I read afterwards were "I wish they'd let Colin speak more"'. Also, as much as he appreciated the episode's representation of different styles of communication, he said 'there are subtitles' which could have been used instead of the repetition of some of his lines. This strategy is analogous to the closed captions

frequently employed as an aid to the audience when characters speak multiple languages.

Having said this, he agreed with my appreciation of how 3.5 in particular challenges stereotypes which were prevalent in the period but still persist today, and how it often presents them precisely in order to question (if not quite subvert) them. For instance, remaining within the parameters of communication, near the beginning of 3.5, Jacob assists the superintendent of St Gideon's, Miss Molyneux, in unpacking another donation from Nonnatus House:

MISS MOLYNEUX: Lovely. I knew that nice little Girls' Brigade leader [Cynthia, a midwife at Nonnatus] wouldn't let us down.

JACOB: The postman nearly did. Late again.

MISS MOLYNEUX: I ought to send you out to the gate to meet him. There's nothing like one of your reproachful stares to make a person toe the line.

JACOB [gesturing with his walking aid]: He's scared I'll hit him with my stick.

MISS MOLYNEUX [chuckles, and sighs as she lifts cardigan from box]: Right, Jacob. Are you ready for a spot of crowd control after lunch?

This interaction is interesting. On first watching, it may simply seem like a humorous jibe at one of the forms of pity mentioned earlier by Colin as a performer. However it also serves to emphasise the liminal position *Jacob* as a *character* inhabits at St Gideon's. In large part due to his being 'bright as a button and cheeky as a monkey' (2.4), whilst Jacob is nominally a patient, his role at the home is more akin to a staff member. Consequently, it affords him a responsibility he would probably not be granted outside the institution in the period (at the same time as showcasing his ability to take on such employment, like Colin has taken on the job of performing him). It thereby foreshadows the difficulties this capability has brought him through his intimate connection with fellow resident/patient Sally Harper. Even the level of trust and apparent belief in his essential equity exhibited by Miss Molyneux is not sufficient (within the socio-political context of East London in 1959) to promote the relationship in its true sense – an example of romantic love between two consenting adults.

Aside from the links between this overt expression of McRuer's (2006) concept of compulsory able-bodiedness (and its ironic prevention of the couple conforming to the related idea of compulsory heterosexuality) and the struggles of Delia and Patsy discussed earlier, the interactions mentioned thus far assert the inherent autonomy of disabled individuals regardless of the era in which they live. Concurrently, of course, the harder parts of their plotline arising from the specific environment and attitudes of the late fifties were presented. As Colin commented in his blog for Scope, this was crucial in terms of education, because the issues deserved recognition. Moreover, it might be posited as integral to the ethos encompassing the programme, since it illustrates the commitment to the combination of accuracy and authenticity articulated by McGann (2015). However, given that 3.5 still sits comparatively early in the trajectory of a show that has (to date) been commissioned up to Series Eleven, the sensitivity with which such a seemingly bold and difficult storyline was approached is striking. Colin addressed this aspect approvingly during our interview:

I think because Heidi, the head writer of *Call the Midwife*, the story was actually based on her own sibling, I can't remember if it was a brother or a sister, but it was quite a close story to theirs, so I think it was dealt with so sensitively because she knew the ins-and-outs of the impact of disability and especially in that era because it was so different to how it is now. Some might argue it's not but I think they were able to describe how people were treated back then as a way of holding up a mirror to society, saying "Look at what we did to disabled people!" and how bad it was.

Such evocations of knowing 'the ins-and-outs of the impact of disability [...] especially in that era' make a pertinent point about the power wielded by individuals *writing* for theatre and television, which relates back to Amy Bethan Evans' (W) opinions in Chapter Five and earlier discussions of the dramatic canon in Chapter Four. Here, though, in terms of new writing, it is interesting to note that many of the disability-related storylines since these episodes have been written by individuals with relevant family experience, which suggests a personal investment in what McGann (2015) might term 'accurate and authentic' representation. These later writers on the show include Andrea Gibb. In 6.5, she introduced the character of Reggie Jackson (portrayed by Daniel Laurie), a young adult with Down's Syndrome, who is now a recurring character.

Returning to 3.5, though, Colin did add a small caveat to his positive perspective, suggesting that the plot *itself* may have been slightly too positive. He felt that

it was kind of, um, a rose-tinted retrospective, because I don't think Jacob would've been quite so nicely treated if he'd got someone pregnant in a Care Home. So it had its pros and cons, but when I was on set they just treated me like any of the other actors really, it was very inclusive.

Before attending to the latter part of his statement (about the inclusive atmosphere on set), it is important to address the idea of it being a 'rose-tinted retrospective'. This is a charge frequently levelled at the show whether in the media or by the public on platforms like Twitter. However, it has also been countered in pieces with titles like 'How *Call the Midwife* smuggled radical social issues into Britain's living rooms' (Wagner 2018), praising the delicate balance of emotions the show manages to convey and inspire, in a strategy akin to the melding of accuracy and authenticity proposed by McGann (2015).

It is this which leads me to place my own caveat on that posed by Colin. I would argue the slightly gentler response to Jacob's actions is not actually that gentle, since he is sent away in disgrace to an institution for disabled men in Ayrshire. Nevertheless, it signals a very conscious if covert acknowledgement on the part of Miss Molyneux that separation on such grounds is unfair, given the consensual nature of his connection with Sally. Moreover, there are sufficient other examples of (perhaps unwitting) prejudice presented alongside the attempts at more positive attitudes. For instance, when Sally's mother takes her out of St Gideon's and over to Nonnatus House for an examination, colleagues Patsy and Trixie have the following whispered exchange in the corridor:

PATSY: Perhaps it's an abdominal tumour? Or trapped wind? I mean, is it even possible?

TRIXIE: I've never heard of it happening. Ever.

Meanwhile, during the actual examination (involving Sally, her mother and two midwives, Chummy and Cynthia), this parallel conversation occurs:

SALLY: Your hands are cold.

CHUMMY: Sorry, old thing, I should've warmed them. I think she's six-and-a-half months.

The interaction here is intriguing; at once compassionate and caring and delivered with a discernible distance. This dynamic is understandable, as Chummy has not yet ascertained how much Sally comprehends. Yet, even if the information about her likely gestation was meant for her mother, a simple shift in pronoun (from 'she' to 'you') would have made it more personable. Thus Chummy's third line offers a subtle glimpse into expectations around intellectual capacity in the period. Similarly, a later scene between Chummy and Mrs Harper (whilst Sally is seen by Dr Turner at his Surgery) offers a perspective on parental dilemmas at the time. It was important to include, if difficult to watch as a disabled person:

MRS HARPER: People said she'd be better off in St Gideon's. Never wanted to send her away, but they said, "you can't be watching her all hours God sends. She'll grow up, she'll develop, the streets are not safe." She smiles at people, Nurse, she thinks everyone's her friend."

CHUMMY: I can imagine. She seems so enormously trusting.

MRS HARPER: Well, when she was eleven, she started wandering off. Never knew where she'd been or who with. So we did what people do. We put her where she'd be safe.

Like I had with Rachel Denning (P) about her portrayal of Penny, aware of this complexity and the line between truthful and sensitive representation, I asked Colin if he found it hard to work on a story with such personal resonance, requiring depiction of difficult decisions for all involved and occasional overt discrimination. He answered:

No, not really. I think because I was acting opposite Sarah for the most part it was kind of like we were in our own little world and it was just a safe environment in which to show that.

I was interested by his response because it made me wonder if that 'safe environment' contributed to his perception of aspects of the episode as being a 'rose-tinted retrospective'. However, the continuation of this thought revealed that he had actually

had some reticence. He was therefore both pleased and relieved at the outcome of the process, as well as *CtM*'s handling of the subject:

I was a bit wary at first in terms of the whole idea of a person with “full mental capacity” having slept with someone with what people might assume to be “less mental capacity” but I think that was challenged because Sarah’s so capable. It wasn’t like it was completely out of the realms of possibility.

This assertion was underscored by Sarah herself, albeit through the words of her character, Sally. When her father says, during a visit from Poplar’s principal police officer Constable Noakes, that she isn’t normal, Sally responds angrily, ‘I *am* normal, at St Gideon’s!’ Her outburst is interesting because it complicates narratives which privilege inclusion above all else, by emphasising the sense of community residential living can create. Consequently, it might suggest some character development for Jacob as well, having found happiness in the environment in which he previously felt so trapped during 2.4. More obviously, though, it signals the distance between Sally’s life and that of her parents and *their* community – along with the assumptions and misunderstandings that might arise from such distance. In acknowledgement of this, it is striking to note that, when the distance is breached by the event of Sally’s pregnancy, it is *bridged* by the midwives of Nonnatus House; and one in particular. Cynthia (who features in the initial examination scene discussed earlier and is portrayed by Bryony Hannah) is quiet, calm and has an affinity for communicating with Sally. On the strength of information from later series, I would ascribe this to her having a brother with ‘water on the brain’, or hydrocephalus (although, at the original broadcast date of 3.5, this was not known):

SALLY: Nobody hurt me.

CYNTHIA: Sally, you’re going to have a baby. You’re not a silly girl, and I do believe you understand what that means. I think you also understand that the baby came about because something happened with a man. Perhaps a man who wanted to get very close to you.

SALLY: Yes.

CYNTHIA: Oh, I know it’s not an easy thing to talk about.

SALLY: It was my boyfriend. And it didn't hurt.

This scene has significance for all areas of this thesis' analysis, much like the scene between Penny, Patsy and Delia discussed previously. In representational terms, it confirms that the encounter was not only consensual but enjoyable and the result of a relationship. With regards to performers' labour processes, in insisting '[n]obody hurt me,' in character as Sally, Sarah Gordy is simultaneously emphasising her own *personal* capacity to offer consent and, professionally, to participate as a performer in productions tackling-emotionally charged topics. Similarly, in stating, '[y]ou're not a silly girl, and I do believe you understand what that means,' in character as Cynthia, Bryony Hannah illustrates her *own* belief that *Sarah* understands. Without comprehension, Sarah could not respond, or have learnt her lines. Moreover, the combination of these two aspects has a bearing on recruitment opportunities, since the showcasing of such skills on a primetime period drama creates a great deal of mainstream exposure. Indeed, it led directly to her casting in Ben Weatherill's (W) contemporary play *Jellyfish* (Bush Theatre 2018, National Theatre [Dorfman] 2019), dealing with a romance between a young woman with Down's Syndrome and her 'neurotypical' partner.

To return to *CtM* and its depiction of a disabled couple, I would suggest the scene following Cynthia's conversation with Sally is of comparable importance for Jacob (and therefore Colin). After the bus journey already discussed, he walks to Sally's house and knocks on the door:

JACOB [as door opens]: I'd like to see my girlfriend, please.

MRS HARPER: You!

SALLY [appearing behind her mother]: Jacob!

JACOB [grinning]: Sally!

SALLY [as they hug]: I didn't tell them.

JACOB: They didn't tell *me*.

[CUT to the front room]

MRS HARPER: I don't care if he's not right, either. He's sharper in the head than she is, he knew what he was doing!

CYNTHIA: Shh Mrs Harper, let's take this one step at a time.

CHUMMY: I took the bull by the horns and made a pot of Rosy Lee. Everyone needs a cup. Especially Jacob, he's had a very long journey.

MRS HARPER: He'll have another long journey back tonight. I wouldn't give him tea, he'll just spill it everywhere.

JACOB [to CHUMMY]: Thank you. [To MRS HARPER] When does Mr Harper come home?

MRS HARPER: If I were you, I'd clear out before he gets here.

JACOB: Because I'm going to ask him if I can marry her.

MRS HARPER: What good would that do? You live in a home. You can't work, you can't keep her.

JACOB: I can do the decent thing.

MRS HARPER: Oh it's a bit bloody late to talk about decent now! [Goes to slap him]

CYNTHIA: Mrs Harper!

SALLY: Leave him alone!

CHUMMY [to SALLY]: Stay calm, old thing, stay calm.

JACOB: I wanted to see her because I wanted to know she was looked after.

MRS HARPER: She is. By me.

JACOB: And I'm glad, because there is a part of me that you cannot see, but she can. And, if she is loved, I can go on living.

Here Jacob's first line has the same function as Sally's final one, in figuring their actions as mutually consensual. Similarly, his interaction with her mother echoes her own in the

earlier scene with her father, by illustrating the distance between the lives they live. Towards the end of this scene, Jacob's earnest line, 'And I'm glad, because there is a part of me that you cannot see, but she can', is comparable in intent to Sally's, 'I am normal, at St Gideon's!' in emphasising the connection their community creates. Yet it could also be considered as an attempt, through the interplay of representation, recruitment and labour processes, to educate the *audience* of the *show* as much as the character with whom he is engaging. Colin (as Jacob) performs this lengthier speech (and indeed the entire scene) with no need for interpretation or mediation. Consequently, the script (and his fellow performers' comprehension of his words) asserts and underscores his autonomy as an actor in his working reality. Just as Jacob's desire to 'do the decent thing' in his relationship with Sally places him on a par with non-disabled boyfriends in the period (and also in the present), Colin's unaided and completely comprehensible communication in this scene places him on a par with his non-disabled fellow performers – because it is the audience who have to do the interpretative work.

This observation of the eventual melding of Colin's presence as a performer with that of his character is parallel to a point made by Jamie Beddard's (P, W, D) in Chapter Four, where it signals the total suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience. In the case of Jacob, though, this melding, and the short, earnest speech which facilitates it, comes as a response, in part, to Mrs Harper's efforts to foreground his difference. Attempting to calm the tense atmosphere, Chummy has made everyone tea, aware that Jacob will be tired from travelling. Mrs Harper's reaction to this – 'I wouldn't give him tea, he'll just spill it everywhere' – points to a potential split which would make his impairment (and therefore Colin's) once again the primary focus of attention. Interestingly, the scene does not then continue to show him drinking tea. However, following his earnest statement to Mrs Harper ('if she is loved, I can go on living'), Cynthia walks Jacob back to Nonnatus House. There, Cynthia and Jacob meet Trixie, portrayed by Helen George:

TRIXIE: Oh, hello.

CYNTHIA: This is Jacob, Trixie. He's a very good friend of Sally Harper's from St Gideon's. I'm just going to pop over the street and ask Tom Hereward if he can arrange a lift back for him.

TRIXIE: Of course. Well I have to say, Jacob, you look as though your day's been as gruelling as mine. [Later, over tea] I thought there were sausage rolls but they seem to have gone walkies. And yesterday, half a pound of luncheon meat just vanished. We must have mice.

JACOB: Lucky mice.

TRIXIE [opens oven and gasps]: Scones. Left there to cool. Simply marvellous. [Realises about the tea] Oh, I'm sorry.

JACOB: I need help.

TRIXIE: Of course. [Sits down to help with cup]

JACOB [after sipping]: That was wonderful.

TRIXIE: Yes. The Sisters have just gone over to Brooke Bond from Typhoo. I'm a Nescafe girl myself so I just kept my head down out of the range of flying missiles.

TOM [entering]: Chauffeur service?

TRIXIE [picking up cup again]: Mr Hereward, do be an angel and butter those scones for us. Jacob's still drinking his tea.

I would situate this scene as most similar to the one between Patsy and Delia and Penny in the maternity ward in 6.2, because it involves combined physical and emotional support. As with the passing of Penny's newborn baby, Trixie's assistance with Jacob's teacup illustrates her acceptance of his needs – but also *Helen's* concurrent acceptance of *Colin's* within their interaction as *fellow performers doing the same job* – in an action which is at once integral in terms of the representation it provides and incidental to the wider plot. Moreover, due to its position *after* Jacob's conversation with Mrs Harper, I suggest that this combined instance of vulnerability for Colin as performer and Jacob as character actually asserts both their autonomy, because their fundamental humanity has already been validated by the speech in the previous scene.

When asked for his thoughts on this scene during our interview, Colin's answer was explicitly linked to labour processes and recruitment. He also incorporated elements of

another 'tea scene' in which he featured, from 2.4 – as well as an alternative example which was ultimately cut:

I thought that was really nice that they included that because actually, at one point in the first episode [2.4] they wanted me to have a cigarette. Obviously that wasn't going to be possible, so I just told them that and they wrote it out. But again, in the Second Series, when they were in the dining hall at the end, I was meant to be the one bringing the tea over to them, but I said I couldn't carry a tray so they got one of the extras to carry the tray behind me, so they were very accommodating. I liked that they showed it onscreen rather than taking the easy way out and just having the tea already there. It was very brave of them I think to do that because, as you say, you don't see it a lot where the needs of the disabled person are being met onscreen.

The latter part of his comment connects the tea scene back to the arc discussed at the beginning of this section. It highlights how, as much as Jacob as a character provides an important and transformative representational example for new father Douglas Roberts, the practical aspects of their interaction provided *Colin* with a meaningful moment of representation as a *performer*. It is also one that combines McGann's (2015) concepts of 'accuracy' and 'authenticity' and extends the medical basis of the show into its 'widest human sense' (124), by including a disabled character who is both more than the primary patient, and of very specific practical use beyond his impairment. This was of additional interest in relation to another of Colin's comments, about the place of disability in the wider genre:

I think the problem that medical dramas have with disabled people is that they can't be cured, so when they present themselves in hospital it's often done in a very negative way, so it's like, "Oh we can only make you feel more comfortable", it's never like "Oh we can improve your quality of life." It's a strange thing. Even with people like Dr House, they were still very focused on him curing the disabled person. I think *Call the Midwife* was big in that, with me and Genevieve [Barr], they just showed the person for who they were – and this is their storyline – and they didn't try to improve their disability in any way.

I would argue that this difference in approach and attitude is discernible through a combination of these two comments, and consequently through the interplay of representation and recruitment. The commitment of the creative and production teams to creating an appropriately accessible working environment for its performers would impact on the way in which storylines were constructed, and vice versa. This might be proposed as a televisual version of Graeae's theatrical aesthetics of access, discussed in Chapter Four, were it standardised as a deliberate strategy. Interestingly, my participants who preferred TV tended to cite the relative accessibility of sets in contrast to theatre buildings as their reasoning, regardless of the atmosphere and attitudes. Indeed, this was the basis of Colin's own preference for the medium, which he used to make a parallel point about casting:

I love TV, I prefer TV to theatre and I know that's the irony with *Inside I'm Dancing* because the reason they gave for not using a guy with CP or MD in that was that it would be too demanding, but if you've ever been on a TV or film set you can fuck off for ninety percent of the time, and then you do your scene, and then you go back to your trailers, so I think it's a quite poor excuse really. And they work around it with child actors so I don't see why they can't work around it with disabled actors.

When this quotation is considered in comparison to Rachel Denning's (P) at the end of this chapter's first section, the pertinent points are found in the perceptions of the relative flexibility of each medium. Whilst she loves both, Rachel felt that

[t]heatre, is much more of a collaboration, there is a rehearsal process, sometimes even time and money to take part in Research and Development. This ensemble nature of creating work means that it is generally more suited to each individual and each individual is given the time and value. Where in TV, everything is a lot quicker and everyone has their own specific job that they are there to do and they stick to you

Conversely, Colin believed TV to be more conducive to adaptation. In acknowledgement of the subjectivities of these experiences, each makes a useful observation. The accessible aspects they identify could potentially be combined to the benefit of both art forms. Indeed, exactly this solution was proposed by another participant, from the

perspective of a production team member rather than a performer. Sue Dunderdale (D) was passionate about the possibilities of each medium, but also aware that structural change is necessary in both to make them sufficiently accessible. Reflecting on changes in practice over the course of her career which have resulted in less rehearsal time in television, Sue said:

what will happen if television starts to utilise properly, disabled actors, autistic actors and so on, which is a fantastic move, if they then try and constrain them to the same schedules non-disabled actors suffer from then they're going to eat them up and spit them out [...] So if you're working with actors who need that kind of consideration that's got to go right to the top in terms of allowing the time that it needs. [...] rehearsal used to save time. Shooting time is expensive, rehearsal isn't very expensive, if you rehearse you don't spend as much time in your shooting time because you're not trying to find the performance in the shooting time, you do it in rehearsal

The financial undercurrents of this comment are striking due to the frequent conflation of disability with extra cost observed in the literature surrounding employment, and reasonable adjustment especially. These led me to emphasise in Chapter Two the particular difficulties of applying the business case for diversity, beyond the more general problems for minority groups observed by Dickens (1999). However, from the angle articulated by Sue, the most useful reasonable adjustment within a creative context – rehearsal – would actually save on cost. Alongside Colin's evocation of the labour protections for child actors (in theatre as well as TV) and Rachel's point about collaboration, this could signal an area in which provision for disabled performers may be positive – for the rest of the creative workforce.

If so, it is another example of the inherently creative and collaborative nature of disability as a catalyst for the synthesis of representation and recruitment that has been a continual undercurrent throughout this chapter. Through its combination of multiple participants' perspectives, it also foregrounds the way the chapter explores the potential afforded by representation of multiple impairments for the provision of employment opportunities across a diverse range of performers and storylines. It additionally illustrates how, in comparing the forms of theatre and television, useful

practice from both sectors can be combined to suggest pathways forward in each. This thereby allows an appropriate return to theatre in Chapter Seven's concluding references to *Emilia* as a frame to reflect on the wider thesis project and possibilities for future work, growth and change.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

This study sought to provide an outline of the position of disability and impairment as an employment issue in UK theatre and television, by charting aspects of practitioners' working realities in the two sectors. Alongside this, it aimed to articulate the interplay between representation and recruitment in relation to disability casting conventions, in order to consider the connection between disability in performance work and its place in the wider UK socioeconomic context. In order to undertake this project, it utilised an interdisciplinary approach across the fields of theatre studies, disability studies and work and employment relations to situate data from interviews with a variety of practitioners from across the sectors within analyses of significant productions. This methodological approach, outlined in Chapter Three was taken in response to Tom Shakespeare's (2014) foregrounding of the importance of representational enquiry being situated in conjunction to examination of disabled people's lived experiences. The study followed the scholarship of Deborah Dean (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b and later), articulating the importance of considering performance work *as* work. It then connected the processes and conventions behind this particular kind of labour with its representational qualities. It did so by foregrounding the intrinsic intertwining of processes and product – or rather processes and *productions*. Connecting the critical perspective of Dean with those of Erving Goffman (1959), Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997, 2009), David Graver (1997) and Bree Hadley (2014), it emphasised the idea of quotidian and continuous performance as a part of the lived, as well as working, realities of disabled performers. In this way, it sought to refine in particular Dean's (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b) proposal that performers exist simultaneously as formal and informal 'proxies' for the public they represent, by exploring the prevalence of this function when situated alongside disability and impairment. This formulation foregrounds the ways in which '[p]erformers' work represents us to ourselves through a variety of media and therefore their working realities (how, why and when they get jobs) represent more than their own experiences as workers' (Dean 2008b 8). It also emphasises the reverse, in that the state of wider society 'both shadows and structures the working realities of [...] performers' (2008a 163). As is evidenced by the placement of the ellipsis in this quotation, the initial articulation was in relation to gender, so part

of my own usage of the theory was to posit how the formal and informal proxy functions specified by this interplay between social and employment structures work in an additional way alongside the new category of disabled performers and in different ways due to the specificity of the already-embodied meanings conveyed by disability and impairment (as evinced by Quayson [2007] and Mitchell and Snyder [2000]). It further engages with the possibility of these meanings not permitting performance beyond this category of 'disabled characters', and queries if this is the case, particularly exploring Dean's (2007) formulation of 'wieldy' and 'unwieldy' symbols (262). This conceptual reconfiguration may be posed as the first contribution of this thesis. It, and other contributions, forms the substance of the discussion in this conclusion, preceding some proposals for possible further enquiry.

Before returning to the arena of professional performance as discussed by Dean, a consideration of this thesis' use of Goffman's (1956, 1959) more mundane understanding of performance underscores a second contribution. This is brought out by connecting it to Hadley's (2014) positioning of disabled people's lived experiences as particularly performative. As mentioned in Chapter Three's methodology, Goffman (1956, 1959) makes scant mention of either disability or impairment. Furthermore, when they do feature, it is to provide examples of negative, even malicious, kinds of performance (1959 127). This thesis foregrounds their *positive* performative possibilities. It does so both in methodological terms (through discussion of interview setups and processes) and practical ones (through examination of empirical data collected during those interviews, as well as analysis of productions).

Beyond this conceptual reframing, the foundational principle of this study was to position disability and impairment explicitly as employment issues in the UK theatre and television industries. It aimed to provide a qualitative map of the current state of play, as well as one for potential futures. It also sought to draw the beginnings of a comparison between the two mediums. Such a project has hitherto not been conducted around the specificities of disability and impairment (cf. Randle and Hardy 2017) either within the particular context of performance work, or across employment in theatre and television more generally (cf. Eikhof and Warhurst 2013). Consequently, this thesis' focus offers a combined conceptual and practical contribution. This is especially evident

in its emphasis of the pertinent connection between the industry-specific recruitment and selection process of casting, and representation.

This foregrounding of an explicit link between representation and recruitment returns the discussion to Dean's 'proxy' thesis, and the implications posed by expanding it to encompass the particular lived and working realities of disabled performers. As observed in Chapter Two, the idea of 'type' suggests to Dean that 'casting directors are looking for people who suggest or embody aspects of the fictional character rather than actors with skills of transformation or invention' (2008a 172). I suggested there that such preferences directly oppose the prevalence of non-disabled casting in the convention termed 'cripping up'. Here, as a concluding contribution reflecting on the perspectives of my participants, I would add that it might also have a bearing on casting conventions more generally. The positive, productive, potential of disability and impairment for all kinds of roles is evident when positioned alongside this thesis' reference to Graver (1997) and Hadley's (2014) theories around *actual* performance and the reframing of Goffman's (1956, 1959) *metaphorical* usage of it. This latter strategy was central to the methodology of the study in ensuring the consideration, if not quite inclusion, of disabled people in his social analogy. These combined suggestions recall Graeae, and Jodi-Alissa Bickerton, the Creative Learning Director's (P, D) assertion that '[t]hat is where Graeae gets its name from, around the Graeae sisters and having to be resourceful and get by with what you have and be bloody awesome at it'. They also evoke a plea for the future from Sarah Hughes (CD), who said, 'I don't want to see non-disabled people playing disabled people. I don't want to see it', although she herself expanded on, and underscored the sensitivities around, such a statement, as does this thesis as whole. Furthermore, that said in cognisance of Dean's (2008b) suggestion that performers' working realities 'represent more than their own experience as workers' (8), an emphasis of such potential *within* the creative industries could have a wider impact on representational and recruitment opportunities for disabled people *outside* of them. This possibility is posed by Dr Hannah Barham-Brown, a GP and a wheelchair user who also campaigns for disability equality. She says:

[w]e need to change the narrative around disability from being one of problems to how disabled people are in fact an asset to the workplace and society, bringing with them a unique range of skills honed from years of living in a society

designed without us in mind; if you want a “problem solver”, employ someone who has daily struggles with the London transport networks (qtd. in Shinkwin and Relph 2019 6)

Barham-Brown’s point about the ‘need to change the narrative around disability’ is particularly pertinent to the topic of this thesis. Her colloquial usage of ‘narrative’ underscores the significance of storytelling (otherwise termed representation) in shaping socioeconomic perceptions of, and ideas about, particular groups. Such strategies and notions were especially evident throughout Chapter Five’s discussion of *Wicked*. They were found specifically in relation to the director’s isolation of Katie Rowley Jones (P) on stage whilst rehearsing for the role of Nessarose, as well as more widely with regards to roles where a character’s impairment is their defining trait. Such characters include Tiny Tim, examined briefly in connection to the significance of this role for Colin Young’s (P) fledgling career.

This in turn emphasises the interdisciplinary connection, between theatre and performance studies and industrial relations, which is at the crux of this thesis project. The deliberate split above, between Colin Young as performer and his characters of Tiny Tim, and Jacob in *Call the Midwife*, here serves as a crucial reminder that, as arenas of performance work, theatre and television also provide and promote recruitment opportunities. This means the representational qualities of theatre and television have a dual effect on recruitment. They not only impact the prospects of disabled people in wider society but more immediately affect those of the disabled people recruited to provide that representation. Colin’s portrayal of Tiny Tim provided him with the hallowed ‘way in’. Whilst I acknowledged, in Chapter Five, Dean’s repeated stresses that this is essential for all performers, I also suggested its particular importance for those who are disabled. Chapter Four’s analysis of *Not I* explored the concept that certain characters readily signify disability whereas others do not. In cognisance of this, the possibility of roles like Tiny Tim functioning as gatekeepers in themselves perhaps positions them as necessities. Despite their potentially problematic representational qualities, they thereby heighten the complexities around entry, and later competition, for disabled performers.

The idea of competition evokes another paradox posed by participants, most explicitly articulated by Colin Young (P) in Chapter Six's discussion of *Call the Midwife*. In suggesting that 'if you make it as a disabled actor it's obviously because you're good – or because you fill a need', Colin illustrated two implicit requirements for disabled performers: the responsibility either to represent a particular impairment 'authentically' or to carry a show on the strength of your skill, or even to do both. This 'double-bind' relates to other participants' desires to be considered primarily as professional performers (for instance Rachel Denning [P] and Fran Mills [P] in Chapter Six, and Jamie Beddard [P] in Chapter Four). It also connects to the wider debates around disclosure and identity evident from Chapter Five's examination of some of the industry's issues. Its presence as yet another paradox emphasises how the interplay between, and intertwined power of, representation and recruitment underscores the importance of both diverse stories and a diverse *workforce*. Additionally, it reinforces that that diversity ought not to consist of the simple inclusion of disabled people as a homogenous group. Rather, following the example of *Call the Midwife* (2012-present) examined in Chapter Six, it might more helpfully comprise the depiction of a variety of experiences *within* the category of disability and impairment – and the concurrent employment of performers with similarly varied experiences. This suggestion is consistent with the anonymous casting participant from Chapter Five who posed the opportunities afforded by 'programming', and also with the perspective of Sarah Hughes (CD), who said:

[h]ave two disabled people, have three. Think about employing somebody with a learning disability, if you possibly can, you know, all of those things. And also be mindful, I think, that it doesn't have to be visible to get your prize. How marvellously subversive if it isn't apparent who your "diversity hire" might be. Don't make it just one, do you know what I mean?

That her suggestions for future good practice include the 'marvellously subversive' idea that it might not be apparent who fills the role of the 'diversity hire' is most obviously evocative of the nuances around hidden impairments, disclosure and 'disability passing' (cf. Brune and Wilson 2014) with which the thesis has been riven. Yet it also engages with conversations around responsibility. Responding to the aforementioned ideas

about disability and impairment's inherently collaborative nature, Matilda Ibini (W), said:

I would also add that at times it can be really exhausting. [...] Just in order to want to be able to do the work, it is almost like we are doing pre-collaboration, preparation for the proper collaboration or whatever, like all the things that we do with our carers are like, [...] time consuming and energy exerting and all of that stuff and then we are expected to go into a room or workplace and still have energy to participate and coordinate and collaborate. It can be bloody exhausting.

Such reminders of the exhaustion associated with representation for practitioners of all kinds are reminiscent of the perspective of David Bellwood (AM) in Chapters Four and Six, where he articulated the extra social work required from D/deaf and disabled performers in rehearsal rooms. They also recall the comments of Becky Barry (P-I) in Chapter Four, which emphasised her hope that 'our D/deaf and disabled colleagues' would eventually be able simply to 'crack on with the job'. They suggest that more heterogeneous concepts of what constitutes representation, and wider comprehensions of what this means in terms of recruitment, would relieve some of the burden on individual practitioners. This would coexist comfortably with calls for the promotion of a multiplicity of narratives.

Recognition of such multiplicity, or indeed plurality, of impairments, lived experiences, and the representational possibilities arising from the combination of these, seemingly requires a significant socio-cultural shift from the current state of play. However, returning to the perspective of Ed Kemp (D, DS) given in Chapter Five, his opinion with regards to dyslexia and similar learning difficulties was that 'the profession has become so used to it that we have almost discounted it'. This suggests that, for certain impairments at least, such a shift may already have taken place. Of course the veracity of this statement might be contradicted by the professional experiences of some practitioners. Nevertheless, the relative success of many prominent performers with dyslexia does point to a kind of progress. It also raises, once again, the issues of disclosure and responsibility, along with queries about what exactly is meant by representation – and, moreover, what renders it 'good' or otherwise. This was best

illustrated, in Chapter Five, through the comparison of the *character* of Nessarose with the position occupied by Adam Elms (P) as a *performer*. Despite his visual impairment, Adam's lengthy career portraying predominantly sighted characters is a testament to the fact that his presence on stage as a disabled performer might nonetheless not be considered representative. By contrast, the representation offered by Nessarose is nominally assured by the very visible presence of her wheelchair on a West End stage. Yet, as discussed in the chapter, her character trajectory, questions around casting, and a myriad of access issues seem to complicate the power of that presence. They perhaps even position it as the opposite of Adam's therefore decidedly unrepresentative.

Interestingly, as also discussed in Chapter Five, this complication was touched on by Ed Kemp (D, DS) when referencing his older actress friend, who was reluctant to disclose any need for accommodation. This in turn carried over to Chapter Six, and Rachel Bagshaw's (D) interest in the fact that the initial performer for her semi-autobiographical show had a body which 'as a kind of canvas for that, didn't express pain, didn't express impairment in any way, and yet she had lived experience of what the subject was of the show'. Furthermore, the combination of these *practitioner* experiences with those examined in Chapter Six in relation to the *character* Delia Busby's traumatic brain injury emphasises the difficulties encountered in 'impairment matching'. That this concept was first broached academically by three disabled women (cf. Wilde, Crawshaw and Sheldon 2018) makes a significant statement about the fluid and nebulous nature of lived experience of disability and impairment. Their article addresses queries about the casting of Sally Hawkins in *The Shape of Water* (2017), a film they consider interesting, although it received much *popular* criticism for apparent adherence to the convention of 'cripping up'. In particular, they highlight Hawkins' experience of learning impairments in order to pose the possibility that she could indeed define as disabled. They thereby illustrate how the *context* of particular kinds of representation can have a crucial impact on its reception, and question whether exact matches are always appropriate to be sought. Beyond 'cripping up', this was observed by Colin Young (P), whose comparison of his professional debut as Jacob in *Call the Midwife* with a later role in CBBC's *The Dumping Ground* emphasised the similarities between the storylines despite the vast difference in era. However, with Jacob and *Call the Midwife*, he felt that the particular period setting meant his character's desire for

independence, and the later depiction of a romantic relationship, was groundbreaking and therefore important.

This suggestion signals the significance of nuance discussed throughout Chapter Six, and returns to the importance of representing a range of impairments and lived experiences of disability. Consequently, in representational and employment terms it evokes again the power of ‘programming’, but it also has a methodological resonance. This study analyses the impact of disability and impairment on the interplay of representation and recruitment in the UK theatre and television industries. Through the prism of particular productions, which are at once temporally situated in the current era (by virtue of their current performance or broadcast) and in the individual periods they depict, it consequently facilitates what was delineated in Chapter Three as an *intracategorical* intersectional approach. This positioned it as examining ‘the intersection of a subset of dimensions of multiple categories’ (McCall 2005 1787), beginning with ‘a unified intersectional core—a single social group, event, or concept—and work[ing] its way outward to analytically unravel one by one the influences of gender, race, class, and so on’ (1787). However, as observed in Chapter Two with reference to the work of Kafer (2013), Shakespeare (2014) and Mounsey (2014) and elaborated on in Chapter Three’s discussion of Rinaldi (2013), certain elements of the nominally ‘single social group’ (McCall 2005 1787) under analysis render it more heterogeneous than might at first be obvious. Moreover, the nature of the *industry* being examined further complicates such methodological positioning, by foregrounding a need to engage with people designated as *outside* that single social group. This raises a query from McBride et al., who articulate the ‘importance of establishing what motivates a study – is it a desire to understand the lived experience of workers at the intersection, or is it to better understand the dynamics of power at work?’ (2014 8)

I would situate this study’s impetus as being motivated by both of these modes of enquiry. That said, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the composition of the eventual sample has meant that the ultimate focus of analysis rests more on the former facet; ‘understand[ing] the lived experiences of workers at the intersection’. Therefore, possibilities for future projects include a more detailed investigation of the latter, ‘the dynamics of power at work’. Such a study might entail an intersectional approach more akin to what McCall (2005) designates as ‘categorical’ or ‘*intercategorical*’ instead of

that discussed above as *'intracategorical'* – so between categories rather than within them. For McCall, 'the categorical approach takes as its point of departure that these categories form more detailed social groups: white women and black women, working- and middle-class men, and so on' (2005 1787). This would also allow for a comparative analysis of experiences of difference within the creative industries which explicitly includes disabled people alongside other marginalised groups. For reasons detailed above and in Chapter Three's methodology, the present study does go some way to attempting this sort of investigation, since participants were all aware of the specificities of their individual experiences. It thereby matches McCall's criteria for intercategory analysis because it 'examine[s] both advantage and disadvantage explicitly and simultaneously' (2005 1787). Moreover, acknowledging the essential heterogeneity of disability and impairment and the fluidity of the boundaries between disabled and non-disabled people necessitates an intrinsic interest in 'the relationships among the social groups defined by the entire set of groups constituting each category' (2005 1787) which characterises the categorical approach.

All of that said, in cognisance of Chapter Three's emphasis on this study as a beginning, it is vital to note that (like the topic and industries it investigates) much academic work remains to be done. The suggestion here, that some elements of the analysis could be designated as *intercategorically* intersectional, merely serves as another example of the ways in which my experiences of conducting the research correlate to aspects of *participants'* experiences – and consequently to structures and practice in the industries exemplified by particular productions. This is perhaps best illustrated by a point from Chapter Six's examination of *Call the Midwife*, which might in turn be positioned as the production closest to intercategory intersectionality, due to the social, cultural and economic diversity of the Poplar population it represents. In exploring the connection between what I termed the show's 'fictional environment' and the 'realities' of its production, I underscored how its depiction of the past is simultaneously mediated by, and impacts on, representation and recruitment in the present. As well as relating back to Dean's 'proxy' thesis (2005, 2007, 2008a and 2008b) and Hannah Barham-Brown's colloquial reference to the power of 'narrative' (qtd. in Shinkwin and Relph 2019 6), it recalls my observation during analysis that the potential future solution to be found in

'programming' which was foregrounded by a participant working in theatre was in fact already discernible in television through the example of *Call the Midwife*.

The placement of such a possibility in this conclusion might suggest that the preliminary comparison between theatre and television attempted throughout the study ultimately considers progress in the latter medium to be more advanced. However, whilst *Call the Midwife* is certainly a positive example, the commencement of the empirical chapters with an analysis of Touretteshero's *Not I* illustrates the equally significant shifts occurring in theatre. Moreover, due to my primary scholarly position residing in theatre studies rather than television and film, additional scope and enquiry would be necessary to parse properly the differences between the two mediums – both in terms of representational qualities and recruitment practices. As a consequence, this conclusion seeks rather to underscore their similarities. It does so via a participant's contribution featured in Chapter Five's analysis of *Wicked*, a production which was positioned paradoxically as a dual bridge, and division, between the more positive practices behind *Not I* and *Call the Midwife*. Amy Bethan Evans (W) set out what I proposed could be a 'secular trinity' for the future of theatre and television, with regards to disability and impairment. Foregrounding the important triplet of representation, casting and access, Amy's perspective both crystallises and connects the qualities which are at the crux of *Not I* and *Call the Midwife*'s parallel good practice, as well as that of many of the practitioners who participated in the interviews for this study.

Consequently, it also evokes the positive elements of Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's *Emilia* (2018, 2019), which were discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Interestingly, as illustrated through the opening exploration of the ways in which *Emilia* combines new writing with canonical references and adaptation, this more recent production employs many of the creative components which constitute *Not I* and *Call the Midwife* as well. However, as underscored in the introductory examination, issues with accessibility during the transfer meant that its positive representational elements were mitigated by the environment in which it was performed. It was thereby simultaneously rendered as a crucible for the possibilities around recruitment and its interplay with representation and a means through which to consider the remaining issues making this interplay difficult as a pathway for the future. In this way, *Emilia* serves as an anchor for another

thread woven through the tapestry of this thesis project from its initial incarnation as a PhD proposal (and which holds together the empirical and theoretical chapters). Commentaries on ideas of space – physical and emotional as well as theatrical and televisual, in terms of venues, bodies and characters – have called for combining the positive parts of each of these multiple mediums. This should also be concurrent to the development of multiple different kinds of spaces, in line with the equally diverse nature of experiences of, and alongside, disability and impairment. Such a shift entails an acknowledgement that the foundations of the creative industries (both architectural and organisational) are ultimately as artificial in their construction as the fictional worlds and characters is their purpose to portray. Rather than being a criticism, much like the work of Rinaldi (2013) and Oscar Holmes IV (2019) discussed in Chapter Three, this is a call to action, to harness the possibility in the inherent creativity of this statement. To recognise, indeed, that rebuilding around alternative and diverse definitions can sometimes be the most powerful response – if necessary, literally, when encountering inaccessible buildings. For, as Emilia3 puts it in her final speech:

The house that has been built around you is not made of stone. The stakes we have been tied to will not survive if our flames burn bright. If they try to burn you, may your fire be stronger than theirs so you can burn the whole fucking house down. Look how far we've come already. Don't stop now. (*Emilia* 2018 100)

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## **Legislation**

Equality Act 2010 (Her Majesty's Government, 2010)