

JCBP



Journal of Consent- Based Performance

Volume 3, Issue 2

JAN 2025

Published by
California State
University, Fullerton
and Theatrical Intimacy
Education

Copyright



Journal of Consent-Based Performance

Editorial Board

Adam Noble, *University of
Houston*

Amanda Rose Villarreal,
*California State University
Fullerton*

Cassie Nordgren, *Austin
Community College*

Cessalee Smith-Stovall, *Stage
a Change Australia*

cfrancis blackchild
Emily Rollie, *Central
Washington University*

Jeremy Sortore, *University of
Michigan*

Joelle Arp-Dunham, *Kansas
State University*

Laura Rikard *University of
South Carolina Upstate*

Mya Brown *University of North
Carolina Greensboro*

Pia Rickman *Nordic Intimacy
Coordinators*

Guest Editor

Catherine Peckinpaugh Vrtis

Founding Editors

Laura Rikard
Chelsea Pace
Amanda Rose Villarreal

Copy Editor

Joey Massa

Published By

California State University
Fullerton Pollak Library

ISSN 2771-8298

Volume 3

Issue 2

Consent is an Access Issue: Rethinking Disability,
Accessibility, and Consent-Based Theatre Practices

January 2025

This issue was collaboratively edited by Amanda
Rose Villarreal and Guest Editor Catherine
Peckinpaugh Vrtis

Front Cover:

Squishy but Firm (2024) written and directed by Regan
Linton at The Kennedy Center Local Theatre Festival.
Pictured (L-R, main photo): Fiona Rose Murphey, Natalie
Illum, Nila Morton, Marlena Chertock, and Regan Linton.
Pictured (L-R, inset): Natalie Illum, Nila Morton, Marlena
Chertock.

Photo: Jati Lindsay.

Call for Papers

The *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* invites artists, educators, and scholars engaged with consent-based performance—in theory or in practice—to interrogate our existing practices and propose new ideas in pursuit of increasingly more equitable, ethical, anti-oppressive, and effective consent-based practices within our field. In our endeavor to promote the work of all individuals engaged in improving the intimacy specialization fields, we invite authors to submit any writings centered upon consent-based performance practices. We encourage authors to submit essays that do the work of:

- Analyzing or interrogating current or past understandings of and approaches to performed intimacy and consent—in theory or in practice
- Questioning or commenting upon the practices that are currently being used to establish consent within performance, modeling continuous adjustment of artistic praxis
- Introducing or investigating theories related to consent and power imbalances in other fields, contextualizing these theories' potential impact upon the further development of consent-based performance
- Documenting the evolution of consent-based performance and similar intimacy specializations throughout history and our current moment
- Analyzing or responding to artistic productions and writings that engage with simulated intimacy and/or the processes that shape these works.

Table Of Contents

Front Matter

	ii	<i>Call for Papers</i>
	iii	<i>Table of Contents</i>
Amanda Rose Villarreal	iv	<i>Time is Money, and Consent is an Access Issue: Editor's Comments</i>
Catherine Peckinpaugh Vrtis	ix	<i>Crippling Consent: A Note from the Guest Editor</i>

Notes From the Field

Kaitlin K. Kerr-Heidenreich	1	<i>Disability Justice: Case Studies from a Disabled Intimacy Coordinator</i>
Grace Thomas	16	<i>Interweaving Accessibility into Theatre: Working with Disabled Creatives for Disabled Audiences as a Disabled Theatre Artist</i>
Sabrina Zanello Jackson	28	<i>Crowdsourcing Content Guidance: A Commons-Based Approach to Harm Reduction in Theatre</i>

Articles

Krista Miranda	49	<i>Sensing Dance: Finding Access Intimacy with a Dysmorphic Bodymind</i>
Nicolas Shannon Savard	77	<i>Queer, Neurodivergent Access Intimacy: Conversations with Katya Vrtis and the Cast of JC Pankratz's Seahorse</i>
Melissa Bondar	97	<i>Micro-Events: A Potential Tool for Navigating Consent and Accessibility in Immersive Theatre</i>
Regan Linton	111	<i>Consent of Creation</i>

Time is Money, and Consent is an Access Issue: Editor's Comments

Our first editorial claimed that the *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* would “stand firmly rooted in the study, practice, and pedagogy of consent-based performance practices,” aiming to establish “a resource for all, fueled by the intimacy community’s collective input and discoveries” (Pace, Rikard, and Villarreal 2022).

This has always been a scholarly endeavor with mitigating power imbalances at its core, rendering our work inherently political. Beyond the power dynamics of people and roles in rehearsal, production, and training processes, the work and theory of consent-based performance is political in its existence as—in alignment with the keen analysis of Dr. Kari Barclay—abject labor (2023). Barclay writes that intimate encounters are abject in their capacity to “make individuals aware of their bodies and the vulnerability they have in the company of others” (18), and that performances of intimacy, as one element of the labor of the artist, are thus abject labor. Within this work, consent “helps artists set a limit on their work such that they are not pressing into the realm of injury” while also working “carve[...] out a space in which artists can experience challenging sensations onstage and explore artistically” (20). These aspirations—supporting the establishing of boundaries while fostering engagement with exploration and embracing artistic challenges—can be mis-deemed as achievements, however, if the collaborators in the room share similar sets of knowledge, life experiences, and boundaries, or if the leaders in the room remain unaware of collaborators’ unspoken—and likely unmet—needs. Systematically reinforced disparities are “always present and felt by those who have been disempowered within these power imbalances, whether or not the facilitators of a space feel them” (Rikard and Villarreal 2023). Noting this, the *JCBP* committed itself to expanding our editorial board and supporting the development of themed issues curated with the guidance of guest editors who could highlight and speak to disparities not frequently addressed in the current dominant narratives of consent-based performance and scholarship.

We began soliciting work that highlighted the scholarship and practice of those whose voices are most often invisibilized within the dominant narratives of the performing arts industries, and who are most often systematically made vulnerable within the existing structures of our industry. This led to the development of our first themed issue: *Notes from the Field: Identity, Inclusion, Intimacy Choreography and Cultural Competence*. This issue’s editorial (2024) builds upon the Bennet model of Intercultural Sensitivity, claiming that the threshold which is “the entry point for cultural competence” is founded upon awareness and is blocked by assumptions.

In approaching a second themed issue, the editorial board reflected upon this statement, asking ourselves: *where might assumptions most often be derailing efforts to promote consent and equity within our work?* as well as asking *whose disenfranchisement is most often assumed to have been addressed without awareness of the human's true needs and without their input?*

The performing arts industries, despite recent improvements and assumptions of monolithic problems having been overcome, continue to be structured based on ableist norms. Accommodations, when requested, are often derided as aesthetically inapposite, are granted as some benevolent boon, or are responded to with the provision of presumed accommodations (if X need is present, Y must be the solution) that are built upon forced intimacy (Mingus 2017) and leave little space for individualized support. As Catherine Peckinpaugh Vrtis, our guest editor for this issue, writes: “an ableist ideology claims that adaptive resources are special privileges exploited by those unwilling to work hard rather than morally neutral adjustments necessary to allow the work to be done” (2025). Similarly, the idea that if mandated accommodations are insufficient, the person experiencing need is at fault, rather than the system which fails to serve. Take, for example, an accommodation which is perhaps awarded frequently for written work, but rarely in the realms of rehearsal and performance, within theatre classrooms: additional time.

Consent-based practitioners ought to be aware of the connection between power and time; the *time is money* adage, especially when fueling behavior and treatment of collaborators, skews power imbalances that already exist further in the benefit of those that sign the checks. Perhaps due to the limited scope of impact any one person, or due to the self-maintaining nature of systematically structured processes and procedures, consent-based practices continue to exist within the production calendar. The *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* must then consider how researchers and practitioners of consent-based approaches to artmaking can “recognize time as a form of power that can be critiqued and transformed” (Miller 2020), interrogate how normative temporalities and timelines within our production and education processes are often imposed upon all participants, and consider how our acceptance of these temporal expectations impacts access to our creative processes, as well as the nature of communicating consent within them.

Consent cannot occur without adequate time, space, and resources to receive, process, and respond to information—without these, a person cannot be considered ‘fully informed’ regardless of whether someone else presented information to them in some way. Knowing this and noting that access needs are common within both classrooms and creative communities—let alone the human population—we turned to Crip Theory to guide our interrogation of how time

impacts accessibility and consent (Kaefer 2013; Miller 2020). Knowing that our combined areas of expertise could not adequately curate Notes from the Field or Articles that analyze the intersection of practice-based research and the fields of Performance Studies and Crip Theory, the editorial board of the *JCBP* is incredibly grateful to Dr. Vrtis, who extended their knowledge, time, energy, and expertise to guiding the formation of this issue and the included works.

This issue opens with Notes from the Field by Kaitlin A. Kerr-Heidenreich, Grace Thomas, and Sabrina Zanello Jackson. Kerr-Heidenreich shares her experiences as a disabled artist serving as director, cultural consultant to nondisabled actors, and intimacy choreographer. Reflection upon these experiences provides readers with insights into how production companies can aim to become more accessible. Kerr-Heidenreich hones in on accessible intimacy choreography practices for audio drama and the value of working with a cultural consultant to inform non-disabled actors' performances of characters with disabilities. Dr. Thomas's "Interweaving Accessibility into Theatre," then, details the devising process behind a verbatim piece titled *Living with... FiBrOmYaLgiA* while discussing steps taken to make the process, as well as the resulting performance, accessible and inclusive. Notable is Dr. Thomas's development and use of nonlinear choreographic phrases—movement vocabularies built to be employed based upon the performers' daily needs and decisions in such a way that the choreography may never be the same, ensuring each performer maintains agency over their movements during the performance while ensuring that all creative collaborators onstage are informed of the possibilities and understand what may occur in space around them. Finally, Zanello Jackson recounts her process in creating "Commons-Based Approach to Harm Reduction in Theatre" by creating a digital repository of crowdsourced content guidance for different productions. Zanello Jackson walks readers through the extensive and iterative process of creating such a resource; introduces readers to the pitfalls of early versions of this database and theory behind its evolutions; and reflects upon the impacts of this project. This project's trajectory illustrates its usefulness to our field and invites further contributions, a call echoed in this Note from the Field.

Dr. Krista Miranda's "Sensing Dance: Finding Access Intimacy with a Dysmorphic Bodymind" opens up our Research Article section, engaging both theoretical and practice-based research in her examination of the ways in which dance pedagogy has functioned. Dr. Miranda asks readers "what would it do to shift agency from instructor to student, and for the tyranny of the visual to be replaced by a more phenomenological felt sense" (53) to create more inclusive and accessible spaces for both performing and witnessing dance. Dr. Miranda's work engages

a variety of Disability Studies and Crip Theory scholars, introducing readers who may not have encountered these fields previously to this work through her keenly accessible authorial voice and by grounding readers unfamiliar with these theories in autoethnographic examples. Her writing processes this scholarship through PAR methodology, crafting an article that introduces these concepts to scholars, students, and practitioners of consent-based performance alike. Further, Miranda examines the use of audio description in *Telephone* as well as the facilitation of dance spaces, identifying methods for teaching and participating in dance that can inspire scholars and practitioners in our field to reconsider not only the tyranny of the visual, but the imposition of our socially normalized exclusive ways of working.

Nicolas Shannon Savard's "Queer, Neurodivergent Access Intimacy" reminds, or perhaps informs, readers of Crip Theory's origins in Queer Theory (Abrams et al 2024), analyzing the work of a consent-based performance artist through concepts from each of these theories. Savard analyzes their experience directing JC Pankratz's *Seahorse* while specifically investigating how accessibility, intimacy choreographic practice, and tenets of consent-based performance impacted each stage of the production, laying out a clear argument that access intimacy must be considered as an artistic impulse, a community norm, and an ongoing, continuously adapting, imperfect-yet-transformative practice. Throughout their PAR-fueled reflection on this process, Savard shares interviews with artists and scholars to further guide readers in connecting the theoretically grounded analysis to broader artistic practices.

Melissa Bondar's "Micro-Events: A Potential Tool for Navigating Consent and Accessibility in Immersive Theatre" interrogates the role of consent and access intimacy within the moments of "Unscripted Intimacies" (Villarreal 2021) that occur between performers and audience members within immersive performance. Bondar builds upon Jorge Lopes Ramos's concept of micro-events, arguing that this methodology supports the development of more accessible and inclusive interactive and immersive productions. Bondar argues that by creating effective micro-events for orientation and throughout productions, accommodations can be more clearly communicated and addressed—even prioritized. Bondar builds on Koppers' argument that accessibility and artistry are not at odds, and that disability culture can both inform and enrich the creative process and aesthetic outcomes, applying this concept to immersive performances and the development of parallel tracks in nonlinear ambulatory performance.

Regan Linton's "Consent of Creation," then, brings this issue to a close, highlighting the ways in which intimacy is inherent to all steps of theatrical production and in which the assumption of awareness often derails consent when artistic collaborators presume to know

how a disabled artist's needs can serve the aesthetic of a production, rather than prioritizing how the artist's needs can be met to elevate their creative process and performance. Presenting case studies from her own life and career to illustrate the current state of our field, Linton then analyzes the production process behind *Squishy but Firm: Sexcapades of a Crip Girl*, a new work which debuted during the Kennedy Center Local Theatre Festival in order to highlight ways of working that can foster new theatrical paradigms that posit disability as an element of expansion and enhancement in creative processes that seek to communicate human experiences.

Amanda Rose Villarreal, PhD—Managing Editor

References

- Abrams, Emily, Colleen Floyd, and Elisa Abes. 2024. "Prioritizing Crip Futures: Applying Crip Theory to Create Accessible Academic Experiences in Higher Education." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 43 (4).
- Barclay, Kari. 2023. *Directing Desire: Intimacy Choreography and Consent in the Twenty-First Century*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kafer, Alison. 2013. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press.
- Miller, Ryan. 2020. "Out of (Queer/Disabled) Time: Temporal Experiences of Disability and LGBTQ+ Identities in U.S. Higher Education." *Critical Education* 11 (16): 1–21
- Miranda, Krista. "Sensing Dance: Finding Access Intimacy with a Dysmorphic Bodymind." *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* 3 (2): 49–76.
- Pace, Chelsea, Laura Rikard, and Amanda Rose Villarreal. 2022. "Welcome to the JCBP." *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* 1 (1): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.46787/jcbp.v1i1.2810>
- Rikard, Laura, and Amanda Rose Villarreal. 2023. "Focus on Impact, Not Intention: Moving from 'Safe' Spaces to Spaces of Acceptable Risk." *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* 2 (1): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.46787/jcbp.v2i1.3646>
- Villarreal, Amanda Rose Hartley. 2021. *Unscripted Intimacies: Negotiating Consent In Gamified Performance*. University of Colorado Boulder. https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/xs55md46x
- Villarreal, Amanda Rose, Mya Brown, and Cessalee Smith-Stovall. 2023. "The Convergence of Consent and Cultural Competence While Staging Intimacy." *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* 2 (2): iv–viii. <https://doi.org/10.46787/jcbp.v2i2.4021>
- Vrtis, Catherine Peckinpugh. 2025. "Crippling Consent: A Note from the Guest Editor." *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* 3 (2): ix–xiv.