Smartwear for Every Body

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ESYMPOSIA 2026: Ecologies of Care_10.06.2026

Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

- Hello, everybody. My name is Marilène Oliver. I'm an associate professor of printmaking and media arts at the University of Alberta and part of the Smartwear Revolution research project at the university, of which I am a co-lead of the Art and Design Working Group. With my colleague Yelena Gluzman, I'm delighted today to be hosting the second of three Smartwear Revolution Arts and Design symposiums on the themes of Artists and Accessibility, Ecologies of Care, and Cripping Collaboration. Before we start, and on behalf of the whole Smartwear Revolution research team, I respectfully acknowledge that the University of Alberta is buildings, labs, research stations and art studios are primarily located on the territory of the Néhiyaw, Niitsitapi, Métis, Nakoda, Dene, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe lands that are now part of treaty six, seven and eight, and homeland of the Métis. Speaking on behalf of myself and my colleagues, hosting this symposium for all members of this university, an institution that aims to contribute to public life and to well-being, and we commit to this mandate. We stand in solidarity with traditional knowledge keepers, and we value and uphold the important contributions of these ways of knowing to our shared futures.
- We have both ASL and CART captioning today. To access the captions, please go to the bottom of the zoom window and click on the more button and then show captions to access the sign language interpretation. Please go back to interpretation and then American Sign Language. Today our CART captioner is Kim Johnson and our interpreters are Jody Morrison and Ginette Stevens. Thank you Kim, Jody and Jenny for your amazing work today. This is a two hour symposium. We will have presentations until 5:15, and then we will take a ten minute break. Please feel free, however, to take breaks whenever you need and have your camera on or off as you wish. Aynaz Raoufian, who's one of our research assistants, will be posting PDFs of the presentations and other resources in the chat. Nico Arnáez will be taking care of our technical issues. Thank you very much Aynaz and Nico for all your help. Please feel free to message Aynaz and Nico directly if you need anything, and of course, myself. We will be recording this session for Smartwear Team Learning and as our speakers have graciously agreed, we will post an edit of the recording to our website, which will be launched shortly. Please feel free to put questions or comments in the chat if you

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would like to share feedback with us directly, but we will also post a link to a Google form where you can provide anonymous feedback or include contact information to have a conversation with us or participate in a paid focus group. And again, Aynaz will be putting a link to that form in the chat now. Before I introduce our amazing speakers today, I'm going to tell you a little bit more about the Smartwear Revolution project, because I imagine this may be new to some of you who are joining us.

- The Smartwear Revolution Research project brings together an international, multidisciplinary team and centers co-design with PLEX or people with lived experience integrating expertise across technology, textiles, art, design and social justice. The goal of the Smartwear Revolution Project is to develop innovative clothing technologies that augment mobility, independence and the ability to alleviate challenges associated with muscle weakness. The project includes a budget of $1.2 million Canadian dollars to invite artists, designers and performers into the project to respond creatively through an artist in residence program and a series of open calls for exhibitions, live performance, dress events, and community engagement initiatives. These activities will culminate in a series of public facing events and all technology and arts and technology festivals. As part of our preparation to launch this open call later this year for creative work, we are now hosting, and this is one of them, three public facing eSymposiums. This is the second symposium. And the first symposium was last week, which focused on artists and accessibility and asked, “How can we create and distribute open calls, artist supports and opportunities that center accessibility as a baseline and not as an afterthought?” Our next and final symposium called Cripping Collaboration on the 17th of June, which is this Wednesday from noon to 2 p.m., will ask how we can invite, embody and sustain modes of collaboration that truly support extraordinary ways of thinking and making? Today, however, our focus is on Ecologies of Care and asks, “How can artistic endeavors at the Smartwear Project contribute to supporting and strengthening existing networks that curate, present, give space and resources to disability practices? It will include a presentation by Nexi Alarcon, Jenni Kowalchuk, Sean Lee and Ginger Carson, followed by exchanging thoughts and thinking together about how to support and expand an ecosystem of disability arts networks. We will do the presentations today, with a presentation by Ginger Carson. Ginger is another Smartwear Revolution research assistant. And I'd like to say that it's Ginger's work that has provided the theme and conceptual framework of today's session. Thank you. Ginger.

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- Ginger Carson is a writer, curator, and student, a PhD student in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture whose research explores curatorial practice through a disability justice lens. Her scholarship is situated at the intersections of crip esthetics, critical disability and curatorial studies, and institutional critique. Ginger holds a master's degree in Art Gallery and Museum Studies from the University of Manchester, and an honors bachelor's degree in the History of Art, Design and Visual Culture from the University of Alberta. Through her role as a researcher with Smartwear Revolution, she is currently curating an exhibition at the McMullen Gallery and contributing to a literature review that will inform a call for submissions for artistic projects and residencies. Thank you, Ginger, for your presentation.

Ginger Carlson, presenter, PhD student:

- Hi, everyone. Just bear with me while I struggle with technology. Here we go. Hi. So great to be here. Thank you, Marilène, for the introduction. And, and, thank you so much for everyone sharing the space with us together and for the presenters. I'm just really grateful. And so I'm going to talk a bit about my research with Smartwear, which has focused on disability arts organizations as a means for better understanding the landscape of disability arts and how Smartwear might best position its work, which is finite and temporary in relation to networks that have and will continue to resource and support disability arts and artists.
- My presentation today focuses on several key themes that have emerged through my research. These themes are not meant to be representative of how every organization I looked at works. As all are incredibly unique and specific to their contexts and communities, histories and scopes of practice, as well as the social, political and financial realities that they contend with. But these themes, will give us a starting point from which we can begin to consider how disability arts organizations are positioning their work, and how our work with Smartwear Revolution might move forward in ways that do not replicate or compete with what is already happening, but rather support it, by leveraging our resources in alignment with the goals and needs of disability arts ecologies. As Marilène mentioned in her introduction, part of our intentions in hosting these symposiums is inviting folks into conversation. And also our intentions with the focus groups in producing the literature review. These all align with our commitments to co-design and a desire to create and facilitate projects in ways that best support and

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resource artists, designers, and other creators. As well as the networks that have and will continue to support disability arts practices long after this project concludes. All the information I will discuss today comes directly from the websites of the organizations I researched. And the next step for us, alongside expanding the scope of this research, will be to invite folks to participate in conversations. Marilène mentioned the Smartwear Revolution will be launched soon, and it's going to have some more information about our literature review and its next steps. So please do take a look. Once it is live, please feel welcome to reach out through the feedback form that's being circulated. If you or an organization you're connected to might be interested in having a conversation with us.

- My first three slides here include lists of organizations whose histories, programs, practices, and contacts I've had a chance to review. In this slide, I included a list of international organizations. There are many, many others. And I'd like to recognize and acknowledge that my research has, is limited in scope currently and primarily considers organizations that are English speaking and situated within the global North. This is a significant gap that will be addressed as we continue this research. I've created a spreadsheet that includes all the organizations listed in these three slides, with links to their websites. And, the resources I discuss in my presentation in case you're interested in learning more. And I believe I will share that with you all at the end of my presentation.
- Here are the national organizations I've looked at. Please feel welcome to submit a feedback form or drop notes in the chat. If you have organizations you'd like to suggest for further research. As I mentioned, it is ongoing. And lastly, here are the organizations I've considered who are within our regional disability arts community. of Smartwear. For each of the themes, I will present these themes that have emerged from my research. I'll follow with an example from one of these organizations that will allow us to explore a bit further how these themes may be enacted in practice. So let's get started.
- The first I'd like to discuss is rooted histories. Disability arts organizations are deeply rooted within their specific contexts. By this I mean that their programs, visions, policies, connections all extend from vast networks of people, communities, relationships, organizations, and initiatives. Historical events, political movements, each of which catalyze and nourish an organization's evolution of its vision, goals, programs, purpose. To consider the concept of rooted histories, I offer the example of The Invisible Practice, which is an organization whose roots are anchored here, in

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Amiskwacîwâskahikan or Edmonton. The Invisible Practice is an indigenous and formed deaf arts collective dedicated to building capacity for deaf-centric creativity. On this slide, I've included two images of workshops that they present alongside the touring production of a 2023 deaf-centric dance theater performance called Carbon Movements. And these two workshops here are Contemporary Dance through a Deaf Lens and Risky Storytelling, an indigenous deaf circle.

- In 2022, when the Invisible Practice was first imagining its work and how it hoped to grow in relation to the communities it serves. Its first official project was a series of consultation events called Intentional Gatherings. Guided by the question, how can the invisible practice serve you? The gatherings were dedicated to collecting community input towards the structuring and launch of the organization. These consultations focused on engaging key stakeholders invested in the processes and outcomes of a local deaf arts collective. Their first goal was to engage and consult with local community deaf patrons, deaf artists, hearing arts groups and organizations, and access providers. Their second goal was to consult with other artists led groups from the deaf arts landscape of Canada, and their third was specifically geared towards indigenous deaf engagement. Intentional gatherings resulted in the creation of this five year strategic plan alongside their vision, mission, and value statements. In this way, the mandate for their organization was both rooted in and directly informed by a relational practice of consulting with a network of deaf and hearing artists, artists led groups and organizations, and community members.
- The next theme I'd like to explore is Responsive & Adaptive. This describes how disability arts organizations respond and adapt to the shifting qualities of disability ecologies, and needs or interests of community members over time. Disability arts is not static, dynamic, and evolving. Their work may directly respond to structural and systemic barriers that prevent or limit the full participation of artists living with disability, or their responsive and adaptive qualities may describe how they show up for community in ways that support them through multiple forms of communication. By responding to and anticipating possible access needs. By creating programs that are designed to respond to specific embodiments, specific conversations, specific moments in time.
- An example of this kind of call and response programming comes from a collaboration between Bodies in Translation, Tangled Art + Disability, and Bodies in Translation. Is a multidisciplinary university community research project that creates collaborative

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partnerships between artists, arts organizations, activists, scholars, and educators, and it's run in partnership between the University of Guelph Revision Research projects and Tangled Art + Disability. And of course, we'll soon hear more about Tangled from their director of programming, Sean Lee. Well, I'll briefly say that they are a disability led arts organization in Toronto. Who program accessible exhibitions, residencies, workshops, film screenings, talks, community gatherings, among many more. Crip Times was a podcast series launched in November 2020. Early on in the ongoing Covid -19 pandemic. It platformed disabled people who, as the project describes, have long been experts of staying home and getting creative with new ways to stay in community with one another. Conversation spanned authentic disability representation, alt text as poetry, art as healing, embracing slowness, to name a few, as a response of acts of care during a global pandemic, Crip Times provided a space where disabled and Mad creatives could share their practices, knowledges, perspectives while cultivating forms of long distance intimacy, connection, and accessibility. It modeled how adaptive forms of programming could respond to a time and context where disability knowledge sharing and community connection were both crucial and critical.

- Intentional World building is the next concept. And for me, it really describes how disability arts organizations and networks seek to create worlds that are not otherwise available or accessible to them. I focus here on Sins Invalid as an organization that moves with so much intention and thoughtfulness around inclusion, who their work is for and by what kinds of worlds they bring into existence. Sins Invalid is a disability justice based movement building and performance project that celebrates disabled people centering and led by disabled, black, indigenous and people of the global majority and queer, trans and non-binary disabled people. Their work has profoundly impacted many disabled people, communities and initiatives through its visioning and enacting of liberatory practices and the transformative work of its founders, Patty Byrne and Leroy S Moore. Byrne, alongside activists Mia Mingus and Stacey Millburn, devised the key principles of disability justice, which has been so influential to disability rights organizing, activism, research, creativity, and community. Together, their labors devised disability justice, which has been so influential like I had that twice here, but that's how influential it was that I had to have it twice. Two principles from Sins Invalid foundational are the 10 Principles of Disability Justice, intersectionality and collective access. By rooting their work within and through their ten guiding principles. Sins Invalid’s projects and performances embody what disability justice practices and

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worldings might look, sound or feel like. In this way, disabled embodiment, solidarity and collectivity become both integral and formative to all aspects of their work, and transformative liberation is enacted.

- The next theme I'll touch on is interdependent networks and relationality. As disability arts ecologies create and nurture many different kinds of networks and relationships across, disability and across creative communities. This work reflects the crucial role that interdependence plays within disability arts. How activities focused on solidarity and collectivity can lead to the creation of relationships, communities and support networks, or the sharing of accessible resources and opportunities. European access provides one example here: their work centers exchange between European deaf and disabled artists through projects directly aimed at countering geographic and artistic isolation, and the building of transnational professional relationships. Their work is produced through a partnership between ten European cultural organizations, and they also support the European Arts and Disability cluster, a membership network of artists, cultural workers, arts organizations and cultural institutions. In this way, they act as a connective tissue that bridges communities of artists such that they can build and share their practices and knowledge across borders, languages and contexts. Another example comes from Creative Connector, a Canadian disability led online collective that seeks to connect and support the disability community by hosting a free artist directory for artists sharing e-listings of accessible events opportunities, providing access to resources and presenting fully online projects. They also host regular member meetups called Community Criss Cross, low barrier online gatherings where artists can find connection and belonging, share resources and align practices across regions and disciplines. Crip News offers another online network example as a Substack weekly newsletter curated by disability scholar and organizer Kevin Botkin. Botkin's newsletters offer link roundups focused on disability arts, culture, activism and politics. As online resource hubs, Crip News and Creative Connector provide accessible platforms where practices, perspectives and voices of disabled creatives are both centered and celebrated.
- My final theme, to consider here is Advocacy, Activism & Systems Change activities that are central to many disability arts organizations. These activities may include training, research projects, the development of reports and toolkits, direct engagement with government policy or funding bodies, or the creation of advocacy and activist networks and resources. Access All Areas in the UK, for example, facilitates many

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programs that are aimed at resourcing and nurturing communities of allies within the sector to create and support opportunities for learning disabled and autistic theater and screen artists. In 2023, for example, they became a core partner of TV Access Project, which is an alliance of ten of the UK's biggest broadcasters pledged to work together to ensure access provision for deaf, disabled and neurodivergent talent on TV. These kinds of activities reflect the inherent political reality of disability arts as situated within cultures and contexts of compulsory and normative, normativised, able-bodiedness and able-mindedness. By reaching outward to build capacity and understanding around the reality of being a disabled, creative advocacy initiatives can challenge societal stigmas and barriers, initiate institutional reflection on access and inclusion, and affect systemic change for both the present and the future of deaf, Mad and disability arts and artists.

- I'll end my presentation with some questions that have emerged through this research, and that really resonate with the Smartwear art and design commitments to find ways to align our efforts with those of disability arts organizations and networks. These questions are especially crucial to our work, as we continue to acknowledge and reflect on how the research project exists as a temporary initiative. While disability Ecologies of Care have and will continue to build worlds, create networks, share ideas and artworks, and advocate for, disabled artists and communities. So these kinds of questions or provocations are how can our work become tangled with or act as a source of nourishment for the networks and organizations who are deeply rooted within disability communities? How might our world building intentionally center access liberation, solidarity? How might our programs and practices respond and adapt to disability communities and to the context of existing care ecologies? How can we position our work in relation to the independent networks that nourish and sustain disability communities? And how can our work function as activism, as a commitment to systems change? So this concludes my presentation. Which is just a review of some of the things that I've been thinking about as a research assistant with Smartwear. And I'm so grateful to you all for listening and for being here today, bringing your perspectives and experiences into conversation with us as we move forward. And, yeah, thank you very much.

Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

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- Thank you so much, Ginger for that really wonderful kind of overview of the disability arts landscape. This project is increasingly humbling, just really it's such an amazing project and just learning how many organizations there are doing so much amazing work. So I thank you for that overview. We do have a couple of minutes, in case anybody has any questions now for Ginger. But we will also have time after the break, to have a longer discussion.

Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

- I did have a question for the other day, which is like, where do you see this research going?

Ginger Carlson, presenter, PhD student:

- Yeah, I don't know, really. I think that it's impossible to find any kind of comprehensive or full, meaningful vision of what is happening. But it, it, as you say, it's just been, you know, and incredibly, humbling and exciting and really, energizing to see and, to think about all of the incredible practices that are happening. And I, yeah, love to find a way to share or spotlight, to highlight, a lot of, this work and in what form, I suppose.

Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

- Yeah, we'll keep talking about it. Maybe a book would be fabulous. Now, that could be an outcome. That would be great as part of the spotlight project as well. Do we have any questions? Okay. Well, we'll come back at the end. And then I will just introduce our next speakers. Okay.
- Our next two speakers, Nexi Alarcon who is the director and communications officer at the John Humphrey Center for Peace and Human Rights, working to advance dignity, freedom, justice and security and security through collaborative relationships and transformative education on peace and human rights. And Jenn Kowalchuk is a member of the Righting Relations Disability Justice Change Lab. Righting Relations is a women-led network that strives to support and build capacity amongst educators and community organizers to provide space and resources for them to connect, reflect on, and organize for social change. The Disability Justice Change Lab, specifically focused on tackling ableism and disability rights.

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Nexi Alarcon,John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights:

- Thank you so much for the introduction. Marilène My name is Nexi Alarcon And like you said, I work with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. As a director of arts and communications. And I have to say, the work I've been able to do with the disability community, especially artists living with disability, has been beautiful, and has been one of the most rewarding work I've done over my ten years of career at the organization.
- Today, we're here to talk about accepting a seat at the table, reflections on disability justice, and the arts from two advocacy groups. And for that, I want to let my colleague Jenn introduce herself.

Jenn Kowalchuk,John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights:

- Hi, I'm Jenn, and I'm here representing a member of one of these groups that we're going to talk about. So the Righting Relations Anti-ableism Change Lab, which recently has changed its name to the Righting Relations Disability Justice Change Lab. And I'm joining you from Saskatoon and, in a little bit, we'll get it more into what these organizations are. So I'll put it back to Nexi. Thank you so much. And I'm coming from Treaty 7 territory Calgary. So if we can go to the next slide, please.

Nexi Alarcon,John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights:

- The John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights is based in Edmonton, and for over 25 years, the JSC has been dedicated to advancing dignity, freedom and justice through collaboration, community collaboration and transformative human right to education. We are very often called the bridge, the bridge between the community and bureaucracy - decision makers. So that's usually our role that we carry in the community. Action on Ableism was a project that lasted about two years. And, and it came, as a response to what we were hearing from community members from another project called, Radical Inclusion.
- One of the things that we heard was that it was very, very hard for artists living with disabilities to be able to, to do their art, to get compensated for it, to apply for grants and funding. And, so it is a Canada wide initiative, action on ableism dedicated to

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challenge the policies, practices, practices and mindsets that hold back people with disabilities. The program amplifies artists living with disabilities and uses workshops led by people living with disabilities and, to shift, public perspective and decision makers perspective.

- All the work that we do, we make sure it's a centering community. So it's not our voice that is the community's voice. Regulation has been JSC's main partner in disability justice and advocacy work, and the international Movement of Adult Educators. And we've got to go to the next slide, please. Thank you so much. It is a national movement of adult educators and organizers, working towards decolonization and radical social change. Within broader relations, the Disability Justice Change Lab brings together people living with disabilities who are working towards making adult education more accessible and more engaging. The Change Lab itself developed out of a noted gap in Right Relations Canada's ability to include persons with disabilities in their organization's work in meaningful and disability aware ways. We have and, well, there are some members of the group, that have been also supporting GSC work throughout the years, and they are radical, a stubborn, beautiful artists and, and grandmothers that have paved the way to the work that we have done, at JSC and of course with Righting Relations.
- The objective of Action on Ableism and the Disability Justice Change Lab, I mean, we connect to support each other, identify gaps with disability justice education, and brainstorm tools and approaches to address those gaps. Both Action on Ableism and the Disability Justice Change Lab are focused on several key objectives.
- First, to empower members to provide a safe environment to explore their lived experiences. This can be something as simple as meeting regularly, and checking in on one another, which in turn, helps to build trust and mutual care. We have never been intrusive. Whenever we talk with the community, we always have to make sure we check in with them. We give them their space and their time to talk, and we build that partnership over time before we put together any project, we have had the years of working together and collaborating together.
- All of this leads up to building a community of solidarity, which means both being inviting to those who might be new and interested in what we do, as well as encouraging members to advocate for the rights of themselves and their communities. Give the tools to community members to do their work and support their communities.

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- Third is advocacy through art, using creative means as tools for raising awareness and challenging ableist narrative. We have built short documentaries, toolkits, scenes and and other different tools to bring awareness to the issues of growing allyship, engaging with stakeholders, allies, another interested, interested or not, community members in understanding disability. Taking it long term, sharing knowledge and experience through performance and education.
- Creating real opportunities for members to lead public discussions on ableism, disability, and the arts. Mentorship is always big for us. And we support the people that we work with, all the way through it and give them the leadership of the project. If we can go to the next slide. Thank you so much. So these groups, like I said before, didn't form overnight. It takes years of collaboration before we put something like this together. And it grew from existing connections and leaps of faith, over years of trust, chair storytelling and advocacy success.
- Not that success is only what it is about, we always said all experiences are important. Some of the key achievements and initiatives can include the anti-ableism training that we develop, and deliver workshops such as Ableist Language, Ableism in the Health Care System and Creating Inclusive Workspace. Creative gatherings hosting semiannual hybrid gatherings that combine learning and intention setting with art making. We also make our arts accessible by hosting the 2020-2024 arts stakeholders sharing circle, which brought together Edmonton arts organizations and artists living with disabilities to tackle barriers to inclusion in the professional arts world. There is a report out of it that we could share later on. So it not only has the barriers, but it also has the solutions coming from the community. And then we have policy advocacy, releasing the Disability Justice Change Labs 2024 report that reflects on the Federal Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which provided a detailed evaluation of the Canadian government's proposed strategy for disability inclusion. And, we can go to the next slide, please. And I'll pass it to Jen. Yeah. Thank you so much.

Jenn Kowalchuk,John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights:

- This is going to bring us to one specific project that we want to talk about. So it'll be a little bit of a case study. It's something that's fairly fresh still. I mean, if you consider the end of last year to still be fresh in our minds, but what we had was a project that ended up being called Tales From a Crypt. Of course, playing on the Tales from the Crypt,

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comic book and series from quite a while ago. But what tales from the crypt project was, was a series of five workshops building upon one another, with the end result being a play. Well, it ends up being like a series of monologues with a bit of a play built around it, centering on the mundane and the maddening experiences of moving through the world as a person with disabilities. This project came directly from a grassroots pitch by a Change Lab member back in January of 2025. We had been gathered in Edmonton to do some work, and it just kind of came naturally out of conversation. And there was really strong backing and enthusiastic idea pitching from the fellow Change Lab members. The mission was clear very early on. Basically, we just wanted to create a fully accessible and inclusive hybrid theater experience that confronts ableism head on.

- Methodologically, the project was rooted in disability justice and sociodrama. And it used a lot of improvization and adaptive improvization to process individual experiences of systemic barriers. The workshops we had the privilege of being able to bring on board a couple of really wonderful professionals. We had Joleen Ballendine, who's the director of education with Edmonton's Rapid Fire Theater, which is an improv theater in the city. And she's quite a celebrated improviser as well. And then we had Agnes Blasko, who was visiting Edmonton for part of a year.
- She is a professor, at Budapest University of Technology and Economics, and she is also associate drama trainer that has done work mostly all across Europe. Our group ended up being a cohort of ten women and non-binary participants, and it was over a period of six months. They developed their voices and monologues through improv comedy, sociodrama exercises, personal expression, writing prompts, and then community sharing and this was all online.
- These workshops were a project unto themselves, but they were also to prepare for a final performance on stage that was gonna be on stage and on screen for a hybrid presentation that was going to take place in November 2025.
- Donna Bulger, who was the Change Lab member, stated that ideas are meant to happen. So of course it wasn't just about the doing, but making sure that we had a guiding framework to help us focus on this growing enthusiasm and what this was actually meant to look like. Our framework merged; the idea behind what socio drama is, which emphasizes exploring societal norms and resolving systemic issues and fostering empathy across often quite divergent and differing perspectives through

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mental and physical work of acting and improvization. And then we tried to integrate also just modern disability justice principles.

- In practical terms, the workshop series progressed intentionally over several phases. We started by co-creating and understanding how we wanted to connect and to build the project, namely that we would gather monthly. At least once a month it would be all online, that it would be a safe but still inquisitive space, open for questions, ideas, sharing, giving feedback, and that we would hold space for one another to explore and express through improv, journaling, writing, chit chatting. From there, participants learned practical monologue writing skills while in group, and they received one-on-one coaching from both Joleen and Agnes to refine their personal narratives of empowerment. Next slide, please. Okay, so as one member noted, quote, this meaning the project was always meant to teach us as much as it might teach anyone else, unquote.
- You already kind of touched upon it, but this is the big thing, is we kind of embrace mistakes or stumbles or roadblocks, those kinds of things, because that's how you learn and get better, of course. But we did learn from the bumps that we hit along the way. So one minor but notable bump that we experienced was the need to slightly change up the initial vision and branding of the performance itself. So as the monologues developed, and so to be able to weave these monologues together, there was an eventual decision to how the performance be a group of friends getting together at a dinner party and then sharing their yarns, their monologues in this kind of, almost like they're all coming to a cabin or something. You know, not specified, but in this, shared space for sharing their ideas.
- It just required changes to our posters, our social media design, and for the artists themselves to consider changes in how they framed and performed their own monologues that they already had mostly prepared. But also more pressingly we encountered structural challenges, such as managing the digital and physical accessibility for both the workshops and the final performance, within a demand of time and capacity as well as, of course, budget. We recognized these issues quite early on. And, these issues kind of only grew as we came closer to the performance date. But it was noted that such challenges could be a true burden on smaller or more isolated groups who might wish to take on a similar project. We were fortunate in that we had you know, a bit of a budget and that we could do this.

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- We were constantly thinking of what if a smaller community group or a small arts organization or just an individual wants to pull something off like this, you know, how would that be for them? And what could we maybe bring to the table for them?
- All right. Continued challenges continued. We also learned that conventional theater spaces as well as multi-purpose spaces that are used for theater, amongst other activities, you know, especially in smaller communities, you might not have a dedicated theater space, but you have kind of these multi-purpose spaces. But these spaces are rarely built for accessibility, almost never. And a group must expend extra effort to adapt their performance to that space. Thankfully.
- We ended up having our performance at Rapid Fire Theater, which is just off Whyte Avenue. And it's a near dream venue. Honestly, I can't recommend them enough. And they continue to be kind of a standard for similar venues when it comes to accessibility. Done thoughtfully, but still within the constraints of a retrofitted building. And as far as I understand it, they're still doing work right now and continuing to increase what accessibility means within their own physical space. So that's really cool.
- Additionally, navigating deeply personal trauma and ableism through narratives requires very empathetic and trauma informed facilitation and, if possible, ample time to build foundational trust among participants. So we already talked about it was nice that this group was kind of established already. People kind of knew and trusted each other from previous experience. But this could be a challenge if one wanted to just get together a group of people that might not know each other very well, because these monologues were deeply personal. And, and so it was really important to keep that in mind as we were working.
- The performance centered on experiences of disability wouldn't be quite right without consideration for accessibility beyond the physical building. To make the final performance of the dinner party truly accessible, we looked at all elements of the space and assessed the accessibility needs for both in-person and online audiences. Because some of our participants were online via a big screen, and some were in-person on the stage, and our audience was in person in chairs. But then also online - this slide shows that we had a wonderful sonographer named Katie. There was real time live captioning that was happening, and projected onto the stage. And then we have like a little clip here - this is one of our performers who did a visual description of herself, and that was something that we made sure to do, before each person did their monologue. Just talking about who am I up here? And thinking about how we're able

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to kind of portray ourselves and include our, even our physical appearances, in the work.

- Here in this picture you can kind of see the projection screen. It's just a white sheet draped over a table.
  This is what the scenography work was all, all projected onto this tablecloth. It was really cool because the performers were sitting at this table- you're watching them, but then you're also seeing what they are saying, displayed upon their table as they were talking.
- When we evaluate the impact of this project, the outcomes are pretty profound. Like for the audiences, it provided empowerment and personal and collective healing moments, which were wonderful to see. And it really did shift some thinking from a kind of a deficit model to one of self-determination, self-expression. And, enthusiasm for creative, creative space and for the audience.
- There was a real rawness to the performances. Like things weren't completely polished because you can imagine everything we did each workshop, everything was completely online, and we only got together in person mostly. Again, some people participate online, right before the performance, like the 1 or 2 days before. So to be able to pull that off and do it smoothly, you know, you're going to have some bumps. And we did. But honestly, I thought it was pretty good. But for the audience that rawness of the performance really shifted the perspective from kind of like a passive awareness, to a very empathetic solidarity with the audiences. And I mean, our audience is with the artists, and our audience was fantastic. They were so enthusiastic and supportive. And the feedback received during and after the performance was really supportive.
- One particular comment that I remember and this isn't like an exact quote, but someone said, it just felt so human. I don't know what it's like to use a wheelchair or to have autism, but it didn't matter at all because that was the person and it wasn't just that person. I've never seen or felt that from a movie or a TV show. So kind of some cool feedback.
- Then finally, beyond the immediate performance, the initiative provides a sustainable legacy. We are creating a final project report and a toolkit that will be free and available for anyone to use, that will serve as a practical blueprint for best practices for inclusive arts organizations. And it will introduce an innovative methodology for integrating

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sociodrama into disability activism, which we haven't seen too much of. And it'll create institutional accountability for future funding, hopefully.

- Unfortunately we don't have time to show clips of the performances, but those are going to be available publicly online soon. Thank you so much, everyone, for your time for being here and, and the organizers for inviting us. We appreciate it. If you have any questions or anything, we'll share our emails. I'll share my email list in the chat later. And, and we have the, at the end of the session to kind of like or go over any questions that you might have.

Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

- Thank you so much for your presentation and for walking us through the amazing Change Labs project which is really fascinating. Really inspirational and also very practically, useful for us to kind of think about, like, the amount of time it takes. Not the time it takes, the time these projects deserve, which with our project is quite challenging because we have quite a short time frame. But, thank you so much for this. I don't know if anybody has any questions at this stage or.

Audience Question:

- How do you ensure that people online have the same experience as the people in person?

Jenn Kowalchuk,John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights:

- Well, it's really difficult, honestly. You know, it's never going to be 100%. I think one of the things that was made a bit better was several of the members who are online - because of their mobility and stuff, they do almost everything online. So for them it doesn't feel odd. They're used to it. But the thing is, we know that for a lot of people, they may not be used to it. And so how do you make them feel? Very included. And I think we've probably all experienced something like that, maybe where we've been in some kind of hybrid meeting or something. And the people that are in-person will just start like chitter chattering and, you know, you're still online and there's a cacophony going on. I don't know what's happening. Like, this is such a mess, you know? And and so even with stuff like that, we try to be really, really mindful.

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- It did help that like the actual workshops when we were learning how to write a monologue, how to do things, everyone was online, it was purely online. So there was no difference in experience now with the actual performances. That was a lot harder. And honestly, one of the things that, continues to be a challenge with that, and I would really I'd be interested in hearing what other people have to say was, is, you know, it's really important if you're telling people that are participating in something online, it's going to be at 2:00. See, in person you better be ready to go at 2:00. It's really unfair if they're sitting there and they're waiting and it's 215 and you know, you're in person and you know, it's like, oh, we're a bit behind because we're waiting for so-and-so or whatever. But, you know, they might not know that and that's not fair to them.
- Timeliness is really like sticking to a schedule is really, really important to making a more seamless experience. But that can be a big issue, especially when you have people who sometimes have mobility issues and they might think it's only going to take them 15 minutes to get to where you need to be, and it'll take longer and you just have to work with that. But then, you know, you have that experience where you're kind of behind and you feel bad. So then how do you change that for the next time around? And we're not sure because we haven't had that next time around yet, but we're thinking of how we can do that. But like, that's just one example of, just really sticking to a schedule is massively important. And I didn't like it because, you know, I was kind of working and trying to lead some of it. And I felt almost mean sometimes. But really you have to be like chop, chop! Yeah. You. Thank you, thank you. So we keep it on that note, we have time for one more question. At this stage. Elisabet, would you like to ask your question?

Audience Question:

- Hello, I'm so impressed and inspired. This is really robust work, and, so my question may be a bit off topic, but I have to ask. I was thinking, you know what I think Relations Canada, they talk about, so adapt education for social change. Right. So it was triggered by “education”. I'm, you know, from the faculty of nursing. So at this time of the year, we're thinking about admissions, admissions, admissions. I'm thinking, what are the opportunities, for admission, you know, for people with disabilities, because the trajectories are so different. I know, for example, in Europe there are equity seats. Are there admission considerations that take into account disability? How are we doing at the university? I know in nursing we don't have such admission considerations and

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don't think you may have it. In your advocacy is this something that you are thinking of? Is this something I mean, do you have advocates within universities? I know, for example, Greece, UK, Germany, other places. So these are real considerations, right? How are we doing in Canada?

Nexi Alarcon, John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights:

- It's hard to get there. Disability advocacy is, can be quite triggering, in different sectors and, and oftentimes, the people that work within those sectors, are very often tokenized and which is quite unfortunate. So at least from what I've heard from community members, is that they are asked to be consultants. They talk, but their ideas are never taken into consideration or advanced, which is the part that is very discouraging for them. And kind of like if we tie that in with a question that's in the chat, how can we ensure that disabled artists are not only participants but project instigators, facilitators, abled leaders and public educators to just give them the lead? You pretty much listen. Are an active listener and truly take into consideration what they have to say and how they want to advance things, because the way they think and the experience will be entirely different to an able bodied experience, you have to also understand that disability means different things to different people, right? It's different to me that it is for the Change Lab on Action on Ableism. And so it would be an entirely different thing for Jenn that has been leading the project. So I think, you carry them with respect and do a lot of mentorship and also, capacity building where you share what you know, and they share what they know. And you come to, you come together to a space where you support each other and you know, is it true, is it really, a collaboration and a partnership and ticket is that. I'm sorry, but it's hard. There are different groups trying to do the work, but it's extremely hard to get into different institutions, you know.

Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

- Thank you. Nexi. Yeah. That's helpful. I think advocacy people are centered in universities, for example we have an office dedicated to Indigenous people. We can keep this for a longer discussion in the breakout room. There is an accessibility and disability department now. The university is just starting that work, but I know from

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supporting disabled students that it's a constant battle, and we just have to keep advocating and supporting. And, we are definitely in a very ableist institution at the University of Alberta. So there is no doubt about that. Every day we realize that more and more. But let's come back. Definitely. Let's maybe make one of the breakout rooms just on this topic: within academic institutions. But I'm going to move along because we are a bit behind and introduce our next speaker, and our next speaker is Sean Lee.

- Sean Lee is the director of programming at Tangled Arts + Disability, which operates Canada's first gallery dedicated to exhibiting Deaf, Mad and disability arts and advancing accessible curatorial practices. For over a decade, Sean has contributed to national and international conversations on disability, arts access, aesthetics, and disability led curatorial practice through exhibitions, public programing, teaching and mentorship. At Tangled, he leads exhibition development, strategic partnerships and institutional initiatives that position disability arts as a site of cultural innovation and civic engagement. Sean has taught and presented with organizations including the Banff Center for the Arts and Creativity and curatorial studies online at Humber College, and the Goethe Institute, and has contributed writing to publications including Curating Access Disability Art, Activism and Creative Accommodation and Living Disability. He regularly advises artists, curators and institutions on accessibility and disability led practice, and I am delighted that Sean Lee is a collaborator on the Smartwear Revolution project.

Sean Lee, Presenter, Tangled Arts + Disability:

- Thank you so much for having me here today. I'm very excited to talk about Tangled. I'm going to actually start just by animating our space together with a bit of a video clip. This is a clip from an exhibition we did called, Admiring All We Accomplished with Deirdre Logue. In collaboration with Vibra Fusion Lab with David Bobier, who I'm going to embarrassingly call out just saying he's here! The wonderful Mr Bobier. So, I'm just going to go ahead and hit play. Also put a link into the chat if this doesn't work as well for everyone. It's a one minute video, where we go through the opening and there will

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be different kinds of audience members, artists, collaborators. Speaking of this exhibition.

- Thank you so much, Marilène and everybody at Smartwear Revolution for inviting me to be a part of this incredible conversation. It's a real privilege to be among such incredible organizers and academics. Scholars. As we mentioned, I'm Sean Lee, and I'm the director of programming at Tangled Art + Disability. We're located on Treaty 13 in Toronto.
- Before I begin, I'll offer a brief visual description of myself learning, from our, from our different practices here. I use he and they pronouns, and I'm a male presenting East Asian Chinese person. I have relatively light skin, with long, dark hair. I'm also somebody who's visibly disabled. So my back curves, my shoulders are uneven. And if we were meeting in person, you'd probably notice I'm pretty short of stature. I am wearing some kind of steampunk glasses. They're these dark brown, circle, frames with these, like, lenses that have these gold rims that float in the center wearing, black t-shirt that says the Future is Accessible. My hair is kind of covering it. And. I was invited here to speak a bit about Tangled. I'd like to spend a little time, just kind of reflecting today on how our conversations at Tangled have really evolved. Since, I was here and since before then.
- As we all heard, Tangled operates the first disability art gallery dedicated to exhibiting artists from the Mad, Deaf, disabled, neurodivergent community, as well as advancing accessible curatorial practices. The gallery has just hit a ten year milestone. But actually the organization itself, some folks may not know, was actually established in 2002, back when a group of cultural makers, community members, kind of came together to form what was then known as the Abilities Arts Festival. And this was sort of an international festival that took place once a year. It was led by a small crowd of dedicated enthusiasts. And really, this was happening in a time before there was more of a formal (to a certain degree), disability arts sector, or at least one that was, becoming more recognized. Over the years, as abilities crowds grew, lots of disability arts organizations were beginning to take charge to crop up around Canada. The Arts Council really started to notice. And councils, including, you know, the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Art councils, and this became a confluence where the small ripples that organizations like Abilities were creating, created a real groundswell. And, it was kind of around this time, around the mid 2000 that Abilities Arts Festival hired Rina Fraticelli as their executive artistic director. And I think, very significantly, Rin, instigated

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a number of changes. But, in my opinion, the most important thing was that she was recognized as a non-disabled person that she needed to bring in. She needed to basically replace herself with a disabled leader. And, this was really significant.

- This was when the organization first hired our first artistic, disability-identified artistic director, Eliza Chandler, which, kind of, shifted Tangled to be the first, and at the time, as far as we know, the only disability-led disability arts organization.
- When people first encountered Tangled, I think they often primarily think of us as a gallery and of course, exhibitions are important. Are a very important part of what we do. But, you know, every year we present a number of solo and group exhibitions, featuring artists from the Mad, Deaf, disabled, neurodivergent community. Both, locally, nationally and internationally. But I think, what's important is that disability arts organizations also play a very, a broader role within their communities, you know, at Tangled one of our most important functions, I would say, is really supporting the artists, not just with exhibition opportunities, but also with, our artists fees, residencies, mentorships, professional development and opportunities for artists to just gather and connect with one another.
- I also think that we function as a site for developing and experimenting with access practices as, I sort of we, we sort of saw together at the video earlier, whether that's, you know, creative audio description or integrated, multi languages, tactile engagement, remote participation, or some sort of sensory access. You know, a lot of these practices are developed collaboratively with the artists themselves.
- A third role that Tangled plays is really in community building. Our gallery serves as a gathering place where artists, audiences, researchers, students, curators, community members can all meet and share knowledge and build relationships. And finally, I think we also kind of act as a bit of a knowledge holder of sorts, over the more than 20 year history here at Tangled, we've really accumulated relationships, access, knowledge, curatorial practices and histories that are shared across, you know, generations of artists and institutions and projects. So while exhibitions are absolutely, the most visible part of what we do, much of what disability arts organizations more broadly do is, I think, relational, we help create the conditions that allow disability arts communities to grow, connect and thrive.
- Disability art itself has kind of historically been framed as an effort towards visibility and inclusion. So already practices like, you know, having image descriptions, ASL translation, remote access play very key roles in reclaiming the gallery as a site for

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disabled people. But I think in order to be a space that's truly, driven and sounded like, like through, a framework of disability, justice is thinking about this as a space that isn't about creating answers, but, about creating new questions. Right? At Tangled and really, I think, across disability arts communities more broadly, we've increasingly found ourselves shifting from different kinds of questions from one set of questions to another. You know, a lot of times access work begins by asking who can enter, who can get into the building? Can they hear the program? Can they read the text? Can they navigate the website? And while those essential questions still remain, building a disability justice framework has pushed us further.

- It asks us to think about who belongs. It's possible for someone to enter a space and still feel that the space wasn't built with them in mind. It's possible to create accommodations while still communicating that certain bodies, minds or body minds or ways of being are really unexpected. Rather than being centered in a space. So belonging requires more than access. It requires culture and it requires relationships. It requires a sense that your presence was imagined rather than merely tolerated. And so I think this is a way in which access aesthetics can really play a role. It's kind of a political form of imagination manifesting different ways of being and knowing that create better, more dynamic and socially transformative art in art spaces. Disability arts isn't just this aesthetic category in the way that we work, but it's a political strategy. It's a means of thinking about alternative futures in the present. You know, the current photos I have here are from an exhibition called Random Access Memory by Syrus Marcus. Syrus, as an artist, has created incredible bodies of work around speculative fiction that disrupts, ablest and racist connections between disability and dystopia by asserting disabled existence, as a site of resistance here and of world building and alternative futures. In this exhibition, for instance, Cyrus literally transformed our gallery into what he called a portal to these multi-dimensional beings who were kind of welcoming our visitors into a different kind of world that's possible. These multi-dimensional beings were framed in these large, larger than life kind of portraits. And there was this beautiful handwritten message on the wall. I remember working with Cyrus on this exhibition and asking him if he'd be interested in thinking about how we might incorporate ASL into such a long piece of text that's on the wall, ASL sort of being a practice that we've learned, from our folks, from the deaf community. When there's large pieces of written text, it can feel kind of, less invitational to deaf community because, as a linguistic minority, they much rather experience text through

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or they much rather experience language through ASL through a visual language rather than through written communication. So we worked with Cyrus to create an accompanying ASL vlog of the message from these multi-dimensional beings. And, here it wasn't just, you know, a static, typical ASL vlog, but instead, we worked with a deaf interpreter. We gave them some instruction and photographs and reference photos of what these multi-dimensional beings look like. They adorn themselves in this fantastic makeup and really interesting clothing that helped them integrate into the esthetic of that world. And I think that was part of the world building process for this alternative future. Cyrus here was rejecting this sort of utopian promise of cure and that dystopian erasure of disabled lives, and instead insisting on sort of alternative models of being that center access, interdependence and radical imagination.

- Today, I think rather than giving sort of this comprehensive overview of Tangled, I just want to talk a bit about how we have worked with and served community and some of the challenges disability arts organizations are really currently navigating, and what we've learned from working alongside, different kinds of researchers, universities, and especially large scale grant funded initiatives. There's a photo here of our Cripping Masculinity project. This was done with Ben Barry as a part of a SSHRC grant and, it accumulated, this three year project culminated in a wonderful exhibition, called Cripping Masculinity. That examined the intersections of fashion and disability. And one of the things that we've learned through projects like these, Bodies in Translation, Frictions of Futurities that disability arts organizations and academic projects, often bring different strengths. You know, partnership organizations like Tangled, can be very deeply embedded in disability arts and communities. We hold these relationships, trust, curatorial expertise and decades of accumulated access knowledge. But also research projects bring different kinds of infrastructure, right? Research publication platforms, evaluation tools, opportunities for knowledge mobilization that can be really difficult for smaller or mid-size organizations to sustain on their own. I think at their best these kinds of partnerships allow our strengths to play off of one another. I'll mention Bodies in Translation, which was a seven year partnership that was done with Eliza Chandler.
- Eliza worked with us to allow us to have really good documentation. This documentation, quite literally, and, it brought together artists, researchers, curators, and community organizations, around disability arts and social justice; but supported, you know, some of the things that we couldn't do behind the scenes. We were able to

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do artist residencies, generate publications and pedagogical resources, and it really helped build relationships that have continued long after the grant itself has sort of concluded. And so for us as a disability arts organization, that kind of infrastructure has been really transformative. And what I appreciate about these partnerships is that they really recognize disability arts organizations, not just as, you know, a community contact or as a venue, but as knowledge holders and collaborators. And I think, the strongest partnerships we've been in really, take on a two fold approach in both the research and the ecosystem itself.

- We've really seen tremendous growth in the visibility of disability arts across so-called Canada. There's a lot of growing interest from galleries and museums and universities, and cultural institutions that want to engage disabled artists and disability communities.
- I think also a lot of disability arts organizations remain relatively under-resourced, right, with limited staff operating resources. And there's a lot of responsibility. And so, I think a big part of how to recognize the value of this work is to see disability perspectives shaping more institutions, projects and conversations, and allow disability artists to really build a culture in which artists are able to thrive and survive in this arts ecology. The most exciting possibilities for partnerships really begin to emerge when we're thinking about how we can create long term sustainability for these artists. Beyond the length of a project's life cycle. So, that's kind of what I'd like to talk about or just end with is that, projects like Bodies in Translation didn't just create research outcomes, right? They helped us build relationships, resources, and knowledge that continue to circulate after the project concluded.
- I find myself wondering often about legacy, you know, not only what a project will create over the next several years, but what will it leave behind, what relationships can be strengthened through it? And what opportunities might exist for artists that don't exist today? For me, these questions kind of sit at the heart of an ecology of care. And that's kind of just with my limited time.
- The question I'll leave, folks, is, how can these kinds of temporary initiatives contribute to the long term health, sustainability, and growth of disability arts communities? You know, when in 2031, when Smartwear concludes, what are disability artists and disability arts organizations? What place will we be in that we're not in today? And that's kind of a provocation. I want to just leave us at, for today.

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Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

- Thank you, Sean. Such a thoughtful presentation. Inspiring again. That's a really wonderful provocation, maybe we will come back to it. We'll take a short break. Now, we've been sitting for quite a long time, so let's take a seven minute break. I hope that's long enough. Please go to the bathroom and get a drink if they need. And then we'll come back. And I think we have enough that we'll go into breakout rooms. So we will create breakout rooms, and we will think about some of these questions that we've been posed at these presentations. But thank you so much, everybody. And Nico is going to be our DJ for the break.
- Welcome back everybody. I hope you have some good discussions in your breakout rooms. We have five minutes left, which is not very long.

Vivian Mushahwar, lead Principal Investigator (PI), Smartwear Revolution:

- In our conversation we were talking about advocacy and especially around payment for artists and Sean had shared. Maybe I'm just going to copy this in, a policy document. Just so I have this in Toronto for the ODSP and arts grants, where now it's possible to be paid arts grants and also still receive disability benefits. I guess the point was around human rights and Nexi was talking about that. And, at least in Alberta, if you're on support from the government because of disability, if you apply for a grant to do your art as an artist, you may lose your benefits, your disability benefits. So, they apparently have worked on that in Ontario and, and, made art grants exempt. So perhaps that's something that we could see how it could happen in Alberta, you know.

Aynaz Raoufian, presenter, MFA student:

- I can share a bit. I guess we were also talking about, funding, Fundings and specifically in Alberta province, that, and also how the political situation of Alberta will affect the fundings and the disabled artists. Yes, and the funding distribution. And I guess we kind of went in the same direction.

Ginger Carlson, presenter, PhD student:

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- We talked a bit, we had some kind of conversation where folks are sharing their experiences, both like personal experiences and, you know, working with organizations around, kind of considering what accessibility means within these contexts. You know, who can access particular spaces or opportunities, but also, you know, understanding the access looks different for everybody. And so we had a bit of sharing around kind of our own relationship to that in different ways.

Marilène Oliver, Co-Lead, Art & Design Working Group:

- Okay. Well, thank you so much. And to everybody who has participated today, we are two minutes away from 6:00 in our court. And our ASL interpreters have been working super, super hard, we'll give them a break. But I want to say thank you to Ginger. Thank you to Sean. Thank you to Lexi. Thank you very much to Yelena Gluzman who helped organize this event. Unfortunately, Yelena was actually flying; and thank you to Jenn as well, Thank you to Nico. Thank you to Al who is our research assistant. And have I forgotten anyone? Thank you to Vivian for making all this possible. Thank you to everybody. And I'm going to end now just by saying thank you to Michelle Kwasnycia who designed the poster. It's also Michelle's birthday today. I'd like to finish by saying happy birthday, Michelle. Thank you team; and you know what you're doing.
- And then finally, we'd love to see you on Wednesday. I can't believe we've already, like, on Symposium three. But on Wednesday from noon to two, we are thinking about Cripping Collaboration. So thank you, everybody for coming and joining us today.