

Hello everybody.

Thank you very much for being here. It's a pleasure to be with you here.

So this is the start of a panel titled

"How do you navigate the relationship between your disability identity, deaf identity, and your artistic identity?"

My name is Edu O.

I'm a cisgender man,

gay, salt-and-pepper, beard, and brown beret.

And I would love you guys to describe yourselves

and give a quick introduction of who you are to your audience.

Hi everyone, and I'm Aristide Rontini. I come from Italy.

I'm a choreographer performer with disability.

I'm a community dance practitioner,

and also activist together with a group called Al Di Qua Artists.

It was a group of Italian artists with disability

fighting for a change in the art system in Italy.

And I'm quite tall.

I have dark brown hair and eyes.

I wear big glasses. Today I'm all in black.

And... My pronouns are he/him.

Thank you.

So my name is Chisato.

My sign name is Chisato... tapping on the nose.

In terms of my background, I'm an artistic director,

a performance artist,

and a BSL art guide.

In terms of my visual appearance,

I have far East Asian appearances.

Because I'm originally from Japan.

I'm now based in London.

I've got dark short hair.

I've got blue and white top on with a design on it.

That's me.

And in terms of pronouns, my pronouns are she, her.

My sign name is this one...

This is a very important panel for me.

I'm very honored to be sharing a panel with you too because this topic especially,

is of a great focus on my own research as an artist and on my doctoral research that I'm carrying out in Brazil.

So I'm really looking forward to hear your thoughts.

And what we are going to discuss today.

So I think the first question that I would like to pose is

how we perceive our identities, our disabled identities,

but not only as an identity, but as a layer of our identity,

because there are many layers to our identities.

This is just one of the layers of our identities

and how that specific layer informs our artistic practice

and artistic identity as performers and artists.

It's a really good point about identity being made,

as it is so multi-faceted and multi-layered.

So first part, my identity is that I am deaf.

I was born in Japan, so I'm Japanese.

I'm a woman.

Of course there are more layers there, but those are three primary identities that I hold,

and those three identities, help create my artistic identity as well.

With all those layers...

how does your... specifically, your deaf identity

informs your work

and allows you to discover different tools or approaches to your artistic practice?

Did it change paths of your artistic choices?

Did it inform choices of your artistic practice?

How do you see that the deaf identity shape your artistic identity?

Looking at the layer of my deaf identity and unpicking it.

I think you are right.

We're using the terms deaf and disabled, but we look at what deaf really means and it is primarily a sensory disability.

And it means that I communicate in a different way that might be expected.

In terms of its concept as a sensory disability.

We've all got five senses.

We've got sight, sound, smell, taste.

And touch. There we go. That's the one.

So we've got five known senses.

I imagine almost like a star, a constellation map.

How they're placed in the sky...

almost a five pointed star.

This means, for example, people who are hearing, may have all five senses, all five points of the star.

My question is whether everyone's star is the same shape.

For example, some people may hear really, really well.

They can...

hear sound and piano strikes really well.

So that part there star is very strong.

Someone may have a very poor sense of taste potentially, so they can't taste things very well.

Everyone's sensory star has a different shape and they have different strengths.

Because I'm deaf I cannot hear things, that means that arm of the star is cut off.

But I'm covered by my other senses.

I still have them in place.

And actually some research says that we have 33 senses instead of the five.

That's why I feel that senses...

I really want to unpick the concept of senses and how they work in our everyday life.

How we perceive concepts, how we take things in audibly through taste and how those all mesh together.

I take this all,

and this is how I create art from my own deaf perspective.

And that's very much my process.

Very interesting question also for me.

Identity is a multi-layered and constantly moving concept,

and I mainly base my research on that.

Questioning the sense of identity and what it is from many points of view, philosophical point of view, such a logical, personal lot.

And I also feel that my disability is just a part of my identity.

And as also Chisato said,

in my work, it has much more importance and relevance in a piece rather than in another.

But the thing that connects all my pieces, I think...

it's questioning the sense of identity in society.

And also the values that are constantly promoted by society.

As my disability consists of having a shorter arm,

I live somehow in a borderline in which

I'm perceived as a disabled sometimes, sometimes not.

And how my body's impacting in the environment is...

I'm adapting, but not that much.

So I also have to be honest to my life experience of disability.

I feel I started to go in the art field, because I sensed a sense of...

non-conformity to the society and I needed a place to think about it

and to bring new values, new perspectives

that disrupt and question society's values.

What interests me as well,

from all the answers that you guys gave,

is this idea of the normativity that we inserted in

and understanding that art comes from the perspective of this point of reference of a cisgender, white male.

Heteronormative that sees anything that is in the periphery of that identity to be peripheral and marginal, but sometimes even inferior

to that Hegemonic thought,

so us that are in that other perspective,

how can we rise or show them that we have our own perspective?

That our own work, our points of reference

for people that are working right now.

How can we show that our perspective is also a reference to other artists.

It's an interesting point we've made talking about what normal is,

normative concepts and what normal really means.

I find it really interesting.

Normal often means something is never unique.

So I think there's a concept of what is normal art.

Maybe normal can create art potentially.

I think we often get the concept that we are not normal.

I like to think that makes us unique.

That's much of my feeling.

I'm happy to be unique.

I feel like that's why I can create my own art, because of that.

I have the feeling of this image of Constellation

and I want to keep on going with this...

The planet is not the center of the universe

and there are constellations.

So a relativity vision.

And how they once started relating to each other.

It's a relation.

And I really would love to point out this rather than having a normative model, because it's a model having another constellation model.

So that people can really relate to each other and find their own unique way to build up something.

Because we are not alone.

We are always in a group feeling a collective system.

So I really would love to promote this kind of constellation system.

Also in the art, because many times we feel theoretically, practically, production wise...

critical wise that we lack something.

I think it's really interesting,

and it's got me thinking about two different ways we can approach this.

So far in my work, there's been incidents where I've led...

So I've been the lead performer,

and then there's been other instances where people have asked me to be involved as a deaf performer.

And the difference between those two situations is quite interesting for me.

For example, the second one where I've been brought in,

the organisers have gone, "oh, we want to bring in a deaf performer"

And I expect them to be like this, I expect this from them.

But then my response has been quite different.

Because I'm not the organiser's concept of what a deaf person is.

I have my own deaf perspective.

Sometimes I find that really difficult.

Sometimes I feel I have to match their concepts.

I have the same feeling.

I have this feeling that there is a model of what the market wants from disabled community artists.

Sorry, deaf and disabled community artist.

But as an artist with disability, I'm an individual and I have my own perspective.

I have my own disability and...

and sometimes I also have the feeling I should match. I don't match.

Is it correct? What happened?

Why does your expectation have always performers with disability on stage with me?

Or... you know?

It's not a choice because I have projects and sometimes
it's on projects that I'm working
and I'm casting people.

It's just project.

I completely agree with you.

I feel that most organisations...

I do have some difficulties with them because,
They expect me to be one way and then I'm different
and there's some cohesion there.

And again talking about processing time, as we've been saying
and some difficulties around that.

Often I end up having to change myself.

I have to adjust myself to fit in those boxes.

But there have been some projects, where I've been involved in...

For example, there's one sound project I was involved in that was really
positive.

I was with two musical artists

and they asked me to get involved with this project

They did have some expectations and my response was...

quite jaw dropping to them, different from what they had expected,
but I was really lucky they were very open and said
"okay, why not? Let's do it your way."

They worked to meet me in the middle.

And that made me so happy, if you know what I mean.

You were lucky!

You also said it. I mean, you projected it out,
you didn't bow.

- Bow? Kneeled? - Kneeled.

Because this isn't oppression in a way.

You're just free to say, "I am this. I am interested in this."

This is my perspective. Let's work together and meet.

I can I add two things more. I have the feeling that now disability
is getting to "what is the normal disability?"

Normativity of disability in a way.

The other thing is that as we bring and voice up different perspectives, methodology, aesthetics, also way of producing, time-wise, space-wise, body-wise, "many-wise"...

We are already disrupting the system asking for a more... a different model.

Based on the relationship and...

and in a way I feel also to slow down a bit...

the system because it's very high productive.

It's also like... as an artist...

Not with disability, but as artists, I also perceive by the community that we are so dedicated and giving so much time to that, that sometimes there is no time for the rest.

Friends, family, partner, partners...

which is also part of our lives.

It's not missionary...

Sometimes I perceive that we also need a change for this kind of things.

I feel...

I don't know about you, but...

Were you talking about breaking away from these models Edu?

A simple answer might be...

I'm very much in the deaf community

Everyone there is deaf, so I think I have maybe broken away from those models, partly by who I'm surrounded by.

And maybe yourselves...

You are in different worlds in terms of your disability.

I don't know if you are in a world with...

members of your own community that have similar disabilities that really understand you.

So I'm just thinking of how we can break away from these models.

Because, for me, in the deaf community, I am normal.

We are all normal, because we're similar as that.

If it's a question for me almost...

the question is, if I was to be, as some people would say normal,
would I actually enjoy it?

Because of my experience.

Just so we control time.

I would love to keep talking about this because it's such a fantastic
conversation

and there's so much to discuss about it, but we are quite short in time.

So I would like to close this with one question.

In what way do you feel that your work breaks away from those normative
concepts?

And how do you think practically

that breaking away from those normative concepts
shape your work as artists?

For me, it depends each time from the project,
because as I told you, I'm more...

I'm inspired by something and I start questioning
using these lenses of questioning society through the work.

But, each time can be different.

Once I worked on a piece
with two dancers and they actually were doing very...
non technical stuff, very small movement.

They were relating to each other, so it was not overproducing
through their body.

It was just connected to the space and the object which were there
and maybe more...

It was more telling a story through object than through the body,
which is also always...

"you are on stage, you are a dancer, you should dance".

Also, this is expectational.

And what kind of dance you should dance... energetic...
very performative way of dancing.

And in that case, for example, I felt I should slow down.

Just do a small movement... and feel each other...

narrate about the project through objects.

That's it.

I mean, for me it was a way to also dislocate myself
from previous work in which I was really choreographing.

I would like thank you both very much.

It was a pleasure to hear you speak and perhaps...

an answer that we can all take from what we all talked about today
is that we need to occupy those spaces.

We need to see people with disability occupying the stage,
the backstage, the spaces, the audiences,
the government, the decision makers, the policy makers, the funders,
the people that are the organisers of venues.

So that normative perspective can be broken finally.

So those things can be seen through the eyes of people like us.

- Thank you. - Thank you so much.