Making the Invisible Visible

Sprout*flix* as a Subaltern Counterpublic to an Exclusionary Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the American non-profit organization Sprout, which works with people with IDD (Intellectual Developmental Disabilities) to create (short) films ranging from documentaries to music videos, is established as an empowering subaltern counterpublic to the hegemonic Habermasian public sphere in which people with a disability are marginalized. This is done by examining alternatives to those aspects that make the hegemonic public sphere exclusionary, as proposed by Stacy Clifford and Nancy Fraser: Clifford's notions of *embodiment* and *collaborative* speech, which are exemplified through analyses of several Sprout films, challenge the primacy of intellectual language and coherent speech, and Fraser's definition of the subaltern counterpublic argues for the importance of an alternative public sphere that contests the dominant public sphere and that holds space for such alternative manners of communication in addition to rational speech.

KEYWORDS

Disability, public sphere, subaltern counterpublic, Sprout*flix*, embodiment, collaborative speech

INTRODUCTION

Disability is a social issue that is often marginalized in multiple aspects of society. According to the World Health Organization, '[p]eople with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in the world' (World Health Organization 2017). The organization furthermore states that they have poorer health, lower educational achievements, participate less in the economy and have higher rates of poverty than non-disabled people, because they are excluded from public life and the dominant public sphere. Sprout is an American non-profit organization that, among other activities, distributes films that exclusively feature people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and organizes festivals to screen these films, subdivided into 'Sprout*flix*' and 'The Sprout Film Festival' respectively. Their goal is to make the invisible visible through these projects that, according to founder Anthony Di Salvo, can 'educate the extended community about the presence of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities' (Di Salvo 2018). This paper looks at why and how disability is often excluded from the public sphere, and how

organizations such as Sprout can challenge these exclusionary practices. This will be done by conducting literature reviews of Jürgen Habermas' conception of the public sphere and of Stacy Clifford's and Nancy Fraser's counterarguments to his public sphere, which they view as exclusionary. Clifford's text offers embodiment and collaborative speech as alternative and complementary manners of communication besides rational speech. Fraser presents the subaltern counterpublic as an alternative space that compensates for the hegemonic public sphere that operates on the liberal basis that democracy can work in an unequal society and therefore tends to exclude subordinate groups. Clifford and Fraser's alternatives will be related to Sprout, Sprout*flix* in particular, through analyses of three short films featured on Sprout*flix*' website, in order to argue that organizations like Sprout*flix* can function as subaltern counterpublics that create room for all manners of communication and that can therefore challenge the exclusionary practices of the hegemonic public sphere.

EXCLUSION FROM THE HABERMASIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

Jürgen Habermas, philosopher, sociologist and founding father of the term 'public sphere', was born with a cleft palate. He argues that because he had difficulty making himself understandable to others, he was quick to realize the importance of communication (Habermas 2008, 15). This played a part in forming the way he thinks about and values discourse: 'discourse is designed to include everyone concerned and to create a third platform on which all pertinent contributions are heard.' It is also the reason why he deems the written word to be superior to the spoken word; it 'disguises the taint of the spoken word,' and '[r]ational discourse borrows [its] reflexivity from the written word' (Habermas 2008, 16). He furthermore argues that, because he has been discriminated against by his peers in his childhood, he experienced exclusion at an early age, which helped to form his sense of morality: '[t]he morality of equal respect for everyone […] is designed to abolish discrimination and to facilitate the inclusion of the marginalized in the network of reciprocal recognition' (Habermas 2008, 17). The combination of this notion of discourse and this sense of morality became important in the particular way in which he describes the public sphere: as a platform where private people can discuss public topics ('open to all in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs' (Habermas 1962, 1)) as equals. Such a space is ideally organized to afford room for anyone to be heard; people can be given a voice and an opportunity to speak their minds, while outside of these spaces they might never have been heard.

At the same time however, the main criticism Habermas receives is that his public sphere is an *ideal* which in practice is not necessarily always fully realized. Stacy Clifford for instance argues that in liberal deliberative democracy, which relies in part on the Habermasian notion of the public

sphere, Habermas himself as well as other deliberative theorists place too much of a focus on the act of rational speech as being the most legitimate tool of discourse in both the public sphere and deliberative democracy. However, not everyone is in fact capable of rational speech, for example because of a disability—in this sense, the speech of certain people is disabled by deliberative theory: '[d]isabled speech affects persons who are refused the opportunity to speak because their mode of communication defies reasonable and coherent standards...' (Clifford 2012, 211-212). What should be added here is the fact that some modes of communication may only *seem* to defy reasonable and coherent standards at first and can in fact be accessed through means such as sign language and speech synthesizers, which will be exemplified by the film analysis of Sprout*flix*' *A Good Life Too*. Habermas does acknowledge the existence of non-verbal speech, such as gestures and facial expressions, but he also believes that this distracts from the transparency of pure speech (hence, again, his preference for the written word), and is thus unreliable. According to Clifford, the exclusion of non-verbal speech obscures that part of reality that can only be revealed through non-verbal speech, such as the reality of people who are unable to perform verbal speech acts (Clifford 2012, 213). By turning to the written word, Habermas, rather than expanding the notion of 'speech', changes his own behavior in order to fit the rational speech ideal of the public sphere. While deliberative theorists value rationality and consensus most, critical deliberative theory challenges this emphasis and argues that it is openness, inclusiveness and contestation that are the most valuable democratic norms. Critical deliberative theorists, according to Clifford, are therefore more open to the idea of revising the notion of what 'speech' exactly is (Clifford 2012, 212).

Embodiment and collaborative speech

In certain situations, the needs of people with IDD have to be represented by others. As stated by political and social philosopher James Bohman, who has written extensively on democracy and public deliberation, the lack of certain capacities 'makes it less likely that the outcomes of deliberation are either just or legitimate' (Bohman 1997, 326; quoted in Clifford 2012, 215). Critical deliberative theorists, however, argue that representation alone leads to a certain injustice because it ignores the communicative powers of *embodiment*. One example Clifford provides in order to illustrate why language is not necessarily the only legitimate form of communication is the case of Frank Haller, a ten year old boy who was arrested in the nineteenth century in accordance with the unsightly beggar ordinances, later termed the 'Ugly Laws' by disability activists Marcia Pearce Burgdorf and Robert Burgdorf, Jr. (Schweik 2009, 23). According to the judge, '[i]ndeed, the class of silent beggars who exhibit deformities, wounds or injuries which tell *plainer than words* their needy and helpless condition are the most successful of solicitors for

charity, and especially is this so when the object of alms is a young and helpless child' (quoted in Clifford 2012, 216). Clifford argues that it is examples like this that first created legitimacy for the value of embodiment, or the *publicity of bodies*, to the disability rights movement (Clifford 2012, 217). Embodiment, in this case, can serve as communication—it can communicate that which cannot be expressed with words and can therefore serve activist purposes. As we can see in the Frank Haller case, however, the different ways in which embodiment can communicate depends on the context of the body's position. Haller, in the unfortunate context of nineteenth century state-issued classism and ableism, was read as embodying not what was wrong with society's treatment of him, but rather what was 'wrong' with the body itself, leading to its removal from the public eye. Although an example more than a century old, this is not something that is completely left in the past, as to this day, '[w]hen embodiment *is* disclosed it usually signifies the marked corporeality of marginalized groups causing them to be treated with aversion while the more privileged remain disembodied...' (Clifford 2012, 217). Here Clifford paraphrases political scientist Iris Marion Young's argument in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), in order to point out that deliberative democratic theorists are disembodied because their focus is on verbal speech alone, meaning that embodiment is only recognized when there is a marginalized group present whose bodies are not in accordance with the more privileged. This acknowledgment of embodiment could then lead to a focus on the difference of bodies rather than on the content of their speech, leading to discrimination and aversion.

One solution for this bodily discrimination could be, according to the disability rights movement, to change the very meaning of the dominant concept of what bodies should look like or how they should function by giving non-disabled people the label 'TAB', meaning 'temporarily able-bodied'. This label helps to show that all human beings are embodied and vulnerable (Clifford 2012, 217), and it could help normalize the idea of disability and create awareness that disability is something that will be a part of most people's lives, if we include the almost inevitable disabilities that accompany old age. The label 'TAB' has the potential to de-Other people with disabilities; the concept behind the label after all states that there may only be a *temporal* difference rather than an *essential* difference between able-bodied and disabled people. Such an approach to disability could help to establish it as, simply put, just something that occurs frequently and that will therefore always require a certain type of support, rather than as an outlier, an exception, a mistake that needs to be ignored or repaired.

To clarify the importance of embodiment, we can look at the medical and social models of disability. In 1980 the World Health Organization made a distinction between 'impairment' and 'disability'. According to the established definitions, an impairment is '[a]ny loss or abnormality

of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function...' while disability is '[a]ny restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being...' (quoted in Barnes 2002, 13). The medical model of disability sees impairment itself as the disabling factor, and sees it as something private; a personal medical problem or obstacle that needs to be cured or overcome before the person in question is able to fully function in society. The social model of disability sees societal barriers as the disablers rather than the impairment, and therefore sees disability as a social consequence of impairment (Crow 1996, 56-57). The dominant view of disability was always the medical model; it has shown up in stories for centuries as something David Hevey calls the *tragedy principle*, 'from Greek Theatre to James Bond villains to Charity Advertising to all the Richard III's, Ravens, and so on...'. The *tragedy principle* means that such stories are based on the idea that disability is a personal issue (Hevey 1993, 424), and that disability is a metaphor for a personal fault, such as punishment for a sin (Hevey 1993, 425). Ugly Laws would be in accordance with the medical model of disability, as they viewed disability as a personal aesthetic problem that should be removed from the periphery of non-disabled people. Even though the Ugly Laws are no longer in effect (although disturbingly, the last documented arrest happened as late as 1974, in Omaha, Nebraska (Schweik 2009, 6)), the aversion that people feel when they see people with a disability in public still exists. As stated by Jenny Morris, an academic in the field of social policy who worked with the United Kingdom government on disability policies, in her *Pride Against Prejudice,* '[i]t is not only physical limitations that restrict us to our homes and those whom we know. It is the knowledge that each entry into the public world will be dominated by stares, by condescension, by pity and by hostility' (Morris 1991, 25). Focusing on disability as a personal flaw that should be cured takes away the attention from creating a more inclusive and understanding society that holds less barriers for people with a disability, which in turn is the goal of the social model of disability.

Whereas the medical model of disability sees disability as something personal, the social model sees it as something public, and therefore something that should be part of the public sphere. Cases like that of Morris' argument result in a vicious circle: because they feel discriminated against or fear for their physical safety when going outside, people with a disability might choose to stay inside more often and exclude themselves from public life and the public sphere, which makes it even more rare and 'abnormal' for a non-disabled person to see someone with a disability in their day to day life, which results in more stigma, apprehension, social exclusion, et cetera. This goes, too, for cases where, for instance, parents or caregivers are apprehensive to take a child with a disability outside for fear of stares or violence. Furthermore, Clifford argues that '[i]nstitutionalization, inaccessible transportation and built barriers spatially mark people with

disabilities as deviant and aberrant, bolstering justification for their exclusion...'. This is why embodiment in the case of disability is not only important because of the inability of rational speech by some people with certain disabilities, but also because by publicizing bodies, disabled bodies become normalized rather than personal and hidden away (Clifford 2012, 217). If bodies become public, they can also become part of the public sphere, as disability will then become a visible and actual social issue that can be discussed. Although we have seen the way in which embodiment could affect discussions within the public sphere, it is still difficult to imagine how embodiment could, in practice, be a part of a specific public sphere. This is why Clifford provides the example of Sue Swenson: Swenson took her physically and developmentally disabled son to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Clifford argues that 'Charlie's embodied participation conveyed a new array of needs that neither his mother nor allies could fully represent without him.' She calls this *collaborative speech*. This is very much in line with one of the slogans of the disability rights movement, which is 'Nothing about us without us'. Collaborative speech also shows an interdependence: Charlie depends on his mother, but Sue also depends on Charlie to be able to be convincing as a disability rights advocate (Clifford 2012, 221). According to Clifford, deliberative democracy should therefore move towards acknowledging human interdependence as the underlying principle of deliberation, rather than rational speech, and this is done through embodied participation (Clifford 2012, 225).

SPROUT*FLIX* AND THE REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY

We can find videos on Sprout*flix*' website in accordance with all the aspects of speech or communication that have been discussed: (disabled) rational speech, collaborative speech, and embodiment. Before discussing several examples, the following needs to be considered: in looking at these examples, we need to keep in mind that this is exactly what they are, *examples*, and not universal experiences in any way. The term disability itself is an umbrella term for different *types* of disabilities; the experience of one disability is not necessarily like the experience of another disability. Additionally, one person's experience of a disability is not necessarily like another person's experience of the same disability. The videos that were chosen are merely illustrations of what Sprout*flix* can mean in terms of representation.

A Good Life Too
An example of Clifford's *disabled rational speech* can be found in a video called *A Good Life Too* (Sprout*flix* 2013), which features the artist Alonzo Clemens, who has a brain injury that results in a speech impediment. His story is subtitled in the video, transforming his words, which are sometimes somewhat hard to understand, into completely clear speech. Having been

institutionalized for 10 years, he reflects on the experience: 'I don't like the staff, that kind of staff is mean, some staff is good. They say he's not part of the world, he's bad. He's not part of the world, he's evil. It felt bad. I want a good life too.' Considering their treatment of Alonzo, his previous caregivers most likely did not try to have understandable conversations with him, but in the video it becomes clear that he does possess rational, coherent speech which can be made accessible to the public sphere, in this case for instance through genuine conversation and subtitles. His caregivers on the other hand, might have in their prejudice *disabled* his speech, which has therefore been 'locked' and destroyed in the private sphere of the institution. If disability continues to be hidden in private spheres and viewed through a medical model, the ability to speak and communicate in ways that seem to 'defy' what is considered the Habermasian ideal of 'reasonable or coherent standards' may continue to be overlooked, thereby disabling those people who do actually possess rational speech and are able to speak for themselves through certain means that can be made available (e.g. non-prejudiced conversation, subtitles, sign language and speech synthesizers).

A Good Life Too allows Alonzo to publicly express himself and share his story, and he is able to cast some light on the way he has been excluded by the people in his life; by engaging in a genuine conversation with him, his disabled speech is recognized and, rather than erasing 'unclear' ways of communicating from the public sphere, such a conversation along with the subtitles work to include it. The subtitles are additionally featured in an artistic manner that aesthetically matches the way he speaks. This means that the subtitles do not take away from his disability; instead, they acknowledge his disability as not being something that needs to be cured through clear words, but as something that makes him an individual. Additionally, the video itself shows Alonzo's art, his process of creating it, and an insight into his emotional world; in other words, it shows his idiosyncrasies, pulling him out of the generalizing, stereotyping discourse and practice that he has been a part of for much of his life. It is furthermore emotionally engaging; it is a beautifully told story, the point of which is to show Alonzo's idiosyncrasies while at the same time having Alonzo *himself* talk about his life, his experiences. Although his story is unique, what he says about healthcare lays bare some of the terrible problems that still exist for many people with disabilities or mental illnesses who are institutionalized. Next to being a basic human right, this is another reason why allowing speech, including speech that at first glance might seem incoherent, to be heard and understood in public is so crucial.

Freefall

Freefall (Sprout*flix* 2012) is a choreographed dance video that exemplifies the importance of Clifford's arguments for *embodiment*, as it shows what disabled bodies, in this particular case

bodies of people with Down's Syndrome, might look like while dancing—an activity that is very much associated with the 'perfect', strong and 'normal' body. By publicizing bodies of people with disabilities engaging in dance, the video challenges what such a 'normal' body would look like, and it can challenge the ways many think about the disabled body, as for instance being immobile or uncontrollable. The video does not include spoken language but, rather, lets moving bodies speak for themselves by showing individuals' self-reliance, confidence, and happiness in their own bodies, possibly inviting kinesthetic empathy and causing audiences to identify with the dancers, thereby 'de-Othering' the dancers' bodies.

The video not only challenges what a dancing body could/should look like, but also ideas about what sort of body can be enjoyed to experience life in. This is an important aspect to add to the ethical discourse around, for instance, Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT). This test is currently widely available to people in many countries—in several countries such as Belgium and Sweden, the test merely costs a few euros and in Sweden the test is a recommended procedure (Fostertest, n.d.). The fear (bio)ethicists have is that by normalizing such a test in a time where disability is already marginalized, it will create an implicit societal pressure to terminate a pregnancy if the NIPT results are positive (Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing: Ethical Issues 2017). This may then also cause people who do carry their pregnancies full-term to be blamed if their child has one of the disabilities NIPT is designed to trace, such as Down's Syndrome, possibly leading to dwindling state support and increased social stigma. Although the test itself cannot be said to be 'good' or 'evil', or in other words, as inherently helping or hurting the cause for emancipation, ethical issues arise when it is *societal pressure* rather than balanced information and the availability of support where needed that influences whatever happens next. If people for instance feel pressure to terminate a pregnancy while it is unclear that their choice would have been the same had there been no such pressure, the normalization of the test adds to the hegemonic narrative that belongs to the widespread medical model of disability that a disabled life is not worth living or too difficult to deal with for parents or caregivers and should therefore be prevented or cured. In *Freefall*, however, we see an expressive and joyful embodiment of lived experience (although it should be noted that the ability to experience joy is not the only legitimization of a life worth living—all people have a right to hardships as well).

One example of a (Dutch) woman who decided to carry her pregnancy through after a positive NIP test shows the importance of a well-balanced public narrative of real lived experience of people with disabilities, as she asked herself: 'How many children with Down don't have wonderful lives?' Tellingly though, she also adds that as soon as she notified her doctor about her decision, he did raise an eyebrow ('Mijn Zwangerschap' 2020). All in all, publicly showing the

embodiment of real lived experience through videos like *Freefall* can help to establish a more complex narrative around life with a disability rather than one that is based on often occurring stereotypes in popular culture, such as 'better-off-dead', 'unable to live a successful life', or 'a burden to family / society' (Black and Pretes 2007, 66).

Acting Normal

While all of Sprout*flix*' videos engage in what Clifford calls *collaborative speech*, the short documentary *Acting Normal* (Sprout*flix* 2009) is especially interesting in this aspect as it operates on two levels. Located in Inglewood, California, the Performing Arts Studio West (PASW) is a collaborative project between non-disabled people and people with disabilities. According to the description of the video, the project was created to change 'the perception of Hollywood casting agents and producers to hire these trained actors to play characters with disabilities in film and television' (Sprout*flix* 2009), as Hollywood is very much in the habit of portraying disability without any people with a disability present in the cast or production (Hevey 1993, 423). This means that PASW is both a collaborative project and a call to action to encourage exclusionary Hollywood practices to engage in collaborative speech as well. At PASW, non-disabled of the acting business such as casting directors, screenwriters and acting coaches work closely together with aspiring actors with disabilities in a reciprocal relationship; in addition to receiving guidance, the actors are also able to influence the process, and this can be extended to Hollywood. While the previously discussed videos challenge stereotypes themselves from 'the outside of Hollywood', this video shows people's efforts to challenge them from within: as the studio's program director John Paizis states, '[y]ou get the chance to see an actor do things that a regular actor would not have thought of as part of his universe.' This means that casting an actor who actually has the disability that is portrayed on screen, or, if this is not possible, including knowledgeable people in the production process, creates a dimension of authenticity in which it is more difficult or perhaps almost impossible to still slip into a stereotypical portrayal.

The video's description furthermore states that '*Acting Normal* is an intimate and cultural look at this group of individual's lives and [shows] that "normal" is what life gives you and what you decide to do with it.' Acting 'normal' then means *acting with what has been given to you,* rather than for instance changing how one would naturally 'act', to fit into a 'normal' mold. Additionally, this could also imply that when non-disabled actors play a character with a disability (which could have been played by somebody with that disability or could have been, but was not, informed by experts), they are in fact not 'acting normal'—not because they are playing somebody outside of a 'normal' mold, but rather because they are not playing with what they have been given. Parallels can here of course be drawn with, for instance, cultural appropriation

and with men playing female roles because women were not allowed to act. An approach that engages in collaborative speech, however, leads both to inclusion in the production process and in the end product and can furthermore contribute to a more inclusive society by creating public narratives of (albeit fictional) lived experience. Much like the case of Sue Swenson and her son at the United Nations, such a collaborative approach both includes people with disabilities and provides legitimacy to the cultural product being created, as it becomes more trustworthy to provide an accurate representation. Until then, videos like *Acting Normal* can expose exclusionary practices while at the same time effectively creating a public narrative of lived experience itself; it works on two layers, as it criticizes Hollywood and at the same time also shows aspiring actors working hard to realize their own dreams. The documentary on Performing Arts Studio West makes public both political and personal goals, and through those very means argues for the importance of collaborative speech.

The short films that Sprout creates are shown at the Sprout Film Festival, where people with or without disabilities can discuss them, learn about disability and change their perception of what a normal body or mind is. In *Exhibiting Cultures*, liberal arts professor Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, president of the California Institute of the Arts, argue that '[t]he stance that is stressed in festivals is active rather than passive, encouraging involvement rather than contemplation' (Karp and Lavine 1991, 282). They also state that '[f]estivals tell stories that deny or ignore the universalizing themes of elite culture, in that they often entail just those cultural experiences and groups that resist the universal' (Karp and Lavine 1991, 283-284). In Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere, sociologist Monica Sassatelli furthermore argues that 'cultural display has a high potential for empowerment' (Sassatelli 2011, 17). In that sense, the Sprout Film Festival can help to make more people aware that people with a disability are a marginalized group and that the problems they encounter in day to day life should be considered public rather than private, in accordance with the move from the medical to the social model of disability.

Sprout*flix* as an organized subaltern counterpublic

We have seen that embodiment and collaborative speech are used as tools to make disability public, in order to make the dominant public sphere less exclusionary. One manner of activism may be the organization of disability rights activists in what Fraser calls *subaltern counterpublics*, to work towards emancipation. Whereas the prominent postcolonial intellectual Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, from whom Frasers borrows the term *subaltern*, argues that the subaltern cannot speak precisely because it resides outside of hegemonic powers and can therefore only be represented as 'the Other' by those who are already in power (Spivak 1983), Fraser gives the subaltern more agency and argues that subaltern counterpublics can serve as an alternative space

for discourse that contests the hegemonic public sphere. Although it is important to realize that such contestations can indeed paradoxically only exist when they can already be heard and are not oppressed or hidden, oppressed voices can sometimes be mediated by the different channels through which the counterpublic can operate in public. In Sprout's case this means embodiment and collaborative speech as alternative modes of communication that bypass the hegemonic representation of 'the Other' in addition to the fact that Sprout*flix*' films are shown in 'agencies, universities and libraries to educate, enlighten and entertain' (Sprout*flix*, n.d.), and that their material is publicly accessible at film festivals and on their website.

Fraser argues that from the very beginning of the public sphere there have been alternative public spheres (Fraser 1990, 61). Her issue with Habermas' idea of the public sphere lies specifically in the fact that he wants people who enter it to bracket their status differences and deliberate 'as if' they were equals (Fraser 1990, 62), 'as if' suggesting that social equality in the public sphere is not real. According to Fraser this bleeds through into discussions, which means that bracketing is not effective and that there are still inequalities in the public sphere (Fraser 1990, 64). She furthermore discusses the assumption of the public sphere that discourse should be 'restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of "private interests" and "private issues" is always undesirable' (Fraser 1990, 62). She points out that '[t]he rhetoric of domestic privacy seeks to exclude some issues and interests from public debate by personalizing and/or familializing them; it casts these as private-domestic or personal-familial matters in contradistinction to public, political matters' (Fraser 1990, 73). This is exactly why, as discussed above, the dominant public sphere is insufficient as a democratic tool. Important issues such as disability are still often seen as private or personal and viewed through a medical model, and are therefore not seen as legitimate. Fraser argues that, even when there are no *formal* exclusions, deliberation can still mask domination when people, although officially participating in the deliberation, are not heard or ignored. This even unintentionally happens in her own text when she only refers to unequal relations based on gender, class and ethnicity, but overlooks disability, as many academic texts that are not specifically about disability do.

According to Habermas, the fact that there are multiple public spheres rather than only one, is a sign of fragmentation and therefore departure from democracy (Fraser 1990, 66). This, however, is on the liberal basis that democracy can work in an unequal society (Fraser 1990, 65). Fraser argues instead that if a society is unequal, it needs a multiplicity of public spheres, or subaltern counterpublics (Fraser 1990, 67) to compensate for this, since subordinate groups tend to be ignored in the dominant public sphere (Fraser 1990, 66). She says that '[i]n my view, the concept of a counterpublic militates in the long run against separatism because it assumes an orientation

that is *publicist*" (Fraser 1990, 67) meaning that it may *seem* separatist to form a group away from the dominant group, but because they contest *publicly* (by for example publicizing bodies), the goal is to *educate and expand* the dominant public sphere. Ultimately, what Sprout*flix* does is function as a subaltern counterpublic by establishing people with a disability as a legitimate marginalized group. Their goal is to make the invisible visible, or the private public, and because they work with film, and often film without verbal speech, they try to reach this goal through embodiment and collaborative speech—by actually showing disabled bodies, not in the context of verbal deliberation, but rather by showing their existence, presence and capabilities, and also by having a close collaboration between non-disabled people (such as the directors of the videos) and people with a disability.

CONCLUSION

Functioning as a subaltern counterpublic that spreads its messages in this public way through embodiment and collaborative speech, organizations like Sprout can help establish people with a disability as a marginalized group. Acknowledging marginalization legitimizes the examination of when, how and why people have become marginalized in the first place. If marginalization is not acknowledged publicly, disability remains hidden, a private issue. Disability would then remain fixed in the space within public interest in which it historically has been—*marginalization* creates inertia, or a structure in society that is not built for change, a structure in which disability seems to 'belong' in the hidden space it is often forced to reside in, but *awareness of marginalization* that asks questions and addresses and challenges what is wrong with society creates movement. In a way, acknowledgment is like pulling the act of marginalization itself out of the margins and helping to establish it as a problem worthy of public discussion and action.

If we look at acknowledgment as a *bridge* between the private and the public, it is important to look at what such a bridge *does.* As historian, philosopher and social scientist Michel de Certeau states in his *Spatial Stories*, '[t]he bridge is ambiguous everywhere: it alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy. […] As a transgression of the limit, a disobedience of the law of the place, it represents a departure [movement], an attack on a state [inertia]...' (De Certeau 1980, 100-101). In its ambiguity, acknowledgment-as-bridge on the one hand, by the mere effect of *being a bridge,* necessarily serves as a confirmation of the existence of at least two 'groups'; one on one side of the bridge, one on the other. It is therefore important to be mindful of the language that is used to describe groups (and even of the word 'group' itself), in order to minimize the idea of an essential separation. On the other hand, acknowledgment-as-bridge disobeys structural inertia, and,

through organizations that serve as subaltern counterpublics, can help make disability a more public 'issue'. This can be achieved by creating a broader definition of 'speech', such as embodiment and collaborative speech, or by using different ways to make speech easier to understand (e.g. subtitles, speech synthesizers, sign language), thereby publicly showing lived experience and challenging stereotypes. In this way, organizations and initiatives like Sprout can ultimately help the integration of people with disabilities into the dominant public sphere.

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