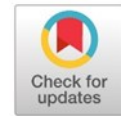


When the silence breaks a border on stage: A case study of a performance by the disabled dance and performance company the “Shizuoka No-Borders”

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the potential of silence to function as a social action and the significance of the use of silence in art and cultural activities by people with disabilities. While silence can be a powerful tool for social action and communication, the silence created by people with disabilities has different connotations. Such people occasionally have problems with communication and improvisation due to their disabilities, possibly leading to unintentional silence. This research analyses the artwork produced by the dance and performance company the “Shizuoka No-Borders,” whose membership includes people with disabilities. The principal research question is as follows: what messages does the silence created by performers with disabilities in their artwork convey to audiences? This research adopts a variety of approaches but primarily conducts qualitative analysis from an empirical perspective. By exploring the current situation of performers with disabilities in Japan as well as their tangible works and scenes featuring “making silence,” this research uses interviews with performers, choreographers, producers, and related stakeholders in Japan to analyse the impact of silence as social action and offer suggestions concerning the effectiveness of promoting diversity and inclusion in education via silence.



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1. Introduction

When silence is created on the stage, how do audiences feel? They may think, laugh, cry, or feel a rush of emotion. Such silence can have a profound resonance with audiences and inspire a tremendous variety of feelings in the context of works of art. Silence is an important component of the performing arts, plays a key role in expression, and occasionally conveys a social message to audiences.

In the context of the performing arts, silence is manageable and controllable for producers, performers, and choreographers. Positive choices can be made to use silence in a scene on stage. However, the context of such silence may be different when the performers have disabilities. According to the definition by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, the category of persons with disabilities includes “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, Art. 1). Performers with disabilities suffer from stereotyping, harassment, and hatred. They have often been marginalized,

especially in the context of dance performances, due to their disabled bodies, and they are labelled differently from able-bodied performers from the perspective of aesthetics (Hermans, 2016, pp. 160-161; Harmon et al., 2018, p. 190). However, this situation in the context of art and cultural activities has been acknowledged and improved since the implementation of related legislation, and support mechanisms for artists with disabilities have been established. Recent performances on stage have made use of the unintended silence created by performers with disabilities as a result of those disabilities.

This article highlights the uniqueness and significance of silence in the context of a disabled performance and the potential of silence to function as a social action. The silence created by “disability” on stage should make audiences feel awkward, and they may believe that this situation is untouchable or involves untouched facts. However, this article considers such awkwardness to be a valuable aspect of works of art and unique products that are antithetical to works that feature idealized bodies or able-bodied performers.

Silence or the unsaid is indicated by audible gaps and pauses in speech. Based on this perspective, throughout this paper, the term “silence” will refer to the following definitions. First, silence (including scenes featuring silence on stage) or the unsaid is not produced “on purpose” but rather occurs unintentionally due to the capacity or ability of the subject. Second, silence should be conceived as a tool to facilitate communication and expression. By creating silence, the artwork performed on stage can leave room for interpretation and communication with the audience.

The objectives of this research are to examine the potential of silence to serve as social action and the significance of utilizing silence in the context of art and cultural activities produced by performers with disabilities as well as to analyse the impact of silence in performing arts. For this purpose, this research analyses the artwork created by a dance project known as the “Shizuoka No-Borders” as a case study. The Shizuoka No-Borders are a dance company project based in the Shizuoka prefecture of Japan. The Shizuoka No-Borders consist of various members who exhibit variation in terms of gender, age, and disability status; most notably, some members are people with disabilities. The members are local volunteers, and most members are recruited from the Loud-hill Project, which was formed to encourage the regional revitalization of Shizuoka by producing stage performances and other types of performing arts with a focus on the local culture and history of Shizuoka (The Loud Hill Project, 2013).

To explore the main theme of this research, the principal research question of this study concerns the types of messages that the silence created by performers with disabilities during their performances conveys to audiences. This research attempts to answer this central question by analysing a tangible scene performed by the Shizuoka No-Borders that features such “silence” as well as by investigating the context, meanings, and impact of that scene with respect to making silence. To answer this main question, the following subquestions are highlighted. 1) How is silence identified in the context of performing arts by persons with disabilities? 2) How can silence function as a potential social action? 3) How can these scenes be important for promoting diversity and inclusion? 4) What is the value of such silence in the context of education?

This research adopts a variety of different methodological approaches but primarily employs qualitative analysis based on case analysis and an empirical approach. By exploring the current situation and status of performers with disabilities in Japan as well as tangible works and scenes produced by the Shizuoka No-Borders involving the process of “making silence,” based on a literature review, a performance review, and interview responses drawn from 5 in-depth interviews with performers (including both able-bodied performers and performers with disabilities) as well as choreographers, producers, and related stakeholders in Japan, this research aims to provide suggestions concerning the effectiveness of creating silence for promoting the values of diversity and inclusion in education.

The overall structure of this article features five sections. Following the introduction, the second section begins by describing the current status and situation of performers with disabilities in law and society and explores the meaning of creating silence in the performing arts. The third section addresses the case analysis by introducing a scene featuring silence drawn from a performance by the Shizuoka No-Borders and addressing the process of designing the scene and the performance. The fourth section presents the findings of this research, focusing on the ways in which the silence created during the scene has an impact on audiences to emphasize the significance of silence with respect to its ability to

function as a social action that can promote the values of diversity and inclusion. The fifth section concludes the article by identifying the limitations of this research and highlighting implications for future study.

2. Visibility and the sound of silence among performers with disabilities in society

This section explores the current legal status and visibility of performers with disabilities, the meaning of the act of creating silence in the context of the performing arts with respect to its function as a tool of expression, and the concept of disabled arts. Throughout this process, this section aims to highlight the idea of silence in the context of art and cultural activities involving people with disabilities and to explore its unique characteristics.

2.1. The legal status of performers with disabilities in law and society

Although the performers with disabilities exhibit differences from the mean to some degree (Kuppers, 2003, p. 5), they are currently acknowledged or even privileged according to the law. A significant milestone with respect to the legal status of persons with disabilities was the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006. The law implements tangible measures to ensure equality, human rights, and fundamental freedom for people with disabilities and to ensure their inherent dignity (The CRPD 2006, Preamble). Regarding cultural activities, Article 30 of the CRPD establishes the rights of people with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport (The CRPD 2006, Art. 30, Section 1). Article 30 also stipulates that states should develop bodies responsible for implementing all appropriate measures to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities (The CRPD 2006, Art. 30). Based on Article 30, Harmon et al. argued that states had certain obligations under the law and that the value of disabled dance and performance entailed that it should be afforded a certain status as a form of cultural heritage (Harmon et al., 2014, pp. 1-2). While disabled performance is a relatively novel topic, it is identified as a form of performance with a different or divergent body and different capabilities, and it is included in the current legal definition of cultural heritage (Harmon et al., 2014, pp. 11-12). Thus, Harmon et al. suggested that the law should consider disabled performance to be a form of cultural heritage and should thus be applied to such performances in a normal manner (Harmon et al., 2014, pp. 14-15).

Japan signed the CRPD in September 2007 and ratified it in January 2014 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 2019). Following the implementation of this law, Japan introduced relevant legislation, and the Act on Cultural and Artistic Activity of Persons with Disabilities came into effect in 2018. In accordance with the basic principles of the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities in 1970, the law aims to promote the individuality and capabilities of people with disabilities by encouraging art and cultural activities and advocating their social engagement (Act on Cultural and Artistic Activity of Persons with Disabilities 2018 (Japan), Art. 1). Article 7 of the Act on Cultural and Artistic Activity of Persons with Disabilities also stipulates the need to develop a basic plan, including comprehensive policies, plans, support mechanisms, and tangible measures for both the central government of Japan and local governments (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2019, pp. 2-3). Since these initiatives have been implemented, the performing arts produced by people with disabilities have become widely accepted in Japanese society. Such a system, which creates a clear category of “disabled art,” may lead an increase in the distance between people with disabilities and able-bodied people (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2019, p. 3); however, performers with disabilities are now visible and acknowledged as artists under the law.

Therefore, performers with disabilities and their artwork are no longer marginalized in contemporary society. Moreover, related legislation supports them in this context. Disabled performing arts are considered a new kind of artwork with its unique values.

2.2. The sound of silence in the performing arts scene

Due to the current state of legislation, the popularity of disabled performance has increased substantially, and disabled performance is now widely accepted by society as a form of art. Additionally, the structure of disabled performance has been considered from a variety of perspectives. In this context, how is silence viewed in the context of the performing arts? What is the meaning of the act of creating silence in contexts involving performers with disabilities?

In the context of the performing arts, creating silence can serve as a powerful tool to facilitate expression. As noted previously, silence in the performing arts may have the potential to allow

audiences to react to the artwork. Additionally, creating silence has the potential to function as a social action. A recent study by Murray and Durrheim identified silence as a form of leverage with respect to social action. According to Murray and Durrheim, the social action accomplished by silence consists of two essential elements, i.e., slipperiness and multiple layers, and these aspects should be taken into consideration, especially by qualitative studies (Murray & Durrheim, 2019, pp. 4-9). Slipperiness refers to ambiguity, such that the context of such silence tends to be left open to individual interpretation; thus, silence itself is a slippery object (Murray & Durrheim, 2019, pp. 9-10). Multiple layers indicate the facts that silence is always created via joint production and that it is articulated by different actions and features various interests on multiple levels (Murray & Durrheim, 2019, pp. 10-12; Tannen, 1985). The various actions taken in this context of silence refer not only to what we do not say but also to our other senses, such as hearing, seeing, and smell, as well as to what is invisible, ignored, avoided, and untouchable; the interactions among these elements establish social actions (Murray & Durrheim, 2019, pp. 10-12).

The act of creating silence itself is a form of nonverbal and intangible communication and expression, but it encourages audiences to consider the associated context, messages, and storylines. The audience can bask in the afterglow of the created silence. In addition, this situation may not only produce a positive context but also create discomfort in the form of a negative atmosphere. Zerubavel explains this context in terms of "remaining silence," which entails not merely the absence of speech but also the presence of nonspeech (Zerubavel, 2019, p. 60). From this perspective, silence is considered to be a communicative system (Zerubavel, 2019; Jaworski, 1993), and performers, producers, and choreographers can include a scene of silence as a means of expression, and silence may be able to convey a more impressive sound to audiences.

However, a different form of silence may also be created when the performers have disabilities. Performers with disabilities occasionally have problems with improvisation due to their disabilities; thus, it may be difficult for them to exhibit appropriate reactions or snappy comebacks on stage instantly, which may even lead to an awkward silence (Bao, 2021, p. 5). This kind of silence is unintentional; instead, it is created as a by-product of natural human activity. In this context, producers and choreographers for the artwork in question understand the characteristics of performers with disabilities and try to make appropriate use of performers' physical reactions in accordance with each disability. Since the disabled body remain negated within a society of normalization and the dance and performance scene (Hermans, 2016, pp. 160-161), producers and choreographers are required to incorporate such silence into their artworks. During this process, the production team can decide to highlight the silence created within a scene. As silence is more difficult to notice than are things that are present (Murray & Durrheim, 2019, pp. 9-10), it is also essential for the performance to include certain elements that cause audiences to realize the occurrence of "silence" as an aspect of the art.

Therefore, the creation of silence, which includes both positive and negative connotations, could be a significant component and means of expression and communication for the performers with disabilities. The methodology of addressing silence and conveying meanings or messages via silence as an aspect of art is a critical challenge faced by such performers.

3. Case study: A performance on stage by the Shizuoka No-Borders

This section introduces a stage performance produced by the Shizuoka No-Borders as a case study and overviews the structure and characteristics of the performing arts project. Additionally, this section focuses on one scene, which was performed in December 2021 by the Shizuoka No-Borders as an opening act for a performance by the contemporary dance company Condors titled *One Vision* (Kondo, 2021), which features unintentional silence created by performers with disabilities.

3.1. A tangible scene created by the Shizuoka No-Borders

Scene 1: Semifinal matches of "Toilet Paper Sumo"

The match begins. The referee is standing between two players. An able-bodied performer is playing the referee, and the players are performers with disabilities (intellectual and physical disabilities). Two long pieces of toilet paper intersect with one another, and each player holds the edges of both pieces of toilet paper. The referee says that "it's time for the semifinal," and in the next breath remarks "ready... go!" The two players pull at the pieces of toilet paper awkwardly and slowly. Since the toilet paper is soft and fragile, the movement seems to be quite unstable. After a few seconds,

one piece is ripped. The two players are utterly unmoved. The theatre is wrapped in thick silence. Eventually, the referee takes the hand of the player who successfully ripped the opponent's toilet paper and proclaims "winner!" Subsequently, the theatre is filled with laughter and boisterous applause.

Scene 2: Final match of "Toilet Paper Sumo"

The referee and two winners of the semifinal matches are standing. It is time for the final match. Audiences have already seen two matches; however, the situation is still far from a foregone conclusion. Audiences may be concerned not only about "who will win" but also about "how it will go" or "if they can do it properly." The theatre is surrounded by silence once again, but this silence is now no longer awkward but warm, and audiences focus on watching the match.

Scene 3: A "Toilet Paper Sumo" scene in *Kiss of Life* as a comparison

Kiss of Life (Katsuyama & Ohno, 2022), which was performed by dance companies involved in the Loud-hill Project in March 2022 and which features able-bodied performers, includes a scene related to "Toilet Paper Sumo." Since the players are able-bodied, all their actions, reflections, and responses are swift and clear. The players congratulate one another immediately following the end of the match. Compared to the performance by the Shizuoka No-Borders, the scene generates a great deal of enthusiasm and does not create silence.

3.2. Initiatives taken by the Shizuoka No-Borders

The Shizuoka No-Borders is a Japanese contemporary dance and performance company that functions as part of a long-term project known as the Loud-hill Project of Shizuoka. The Loud-hill Project was founded in 2013 with the aim of inspiring a regional revitalization of the Shizuoka prefecture of Japan. The project produces various original performing arts presentations that are created and performed by residents of Shizuoka, which focus significantly on local topics as well as the culture and history of Shizuoka (The Loud Hill Project, 2013). The project also consists of several constituent dance companies, including the Shizuoka No-Borders. One noteworthy feature of the Shizuoka No-Borders is that the company consists of a mixed group including performers who are able-bodied and performers with disabilities (including both intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities) who perform and act together. The company was initially created by five members with disabilities in 2019 to serve as the opening act of a performance by another disabled dance company in Saitama prefecture called "Handles" (Kondo, 2019). Since that time, the company has performed on various stages and at different events in Shizuoka. Their performances consist of various contents and scenes, including dance performances, short dramas, projections, and comedy skits. The structure of the group and its local approach are crucial, especially for performers with disabilities. Yasushi Oka, an assistant stage director and performer with a disability, noted the following:

There are only a few places of expression for people with disabilities. It is very important to have such places or opportunities in our local city. Because we cannot move easily. It is very hard for us to travel around for the performing arts and rehearsals. (Oka interview, 2022)

Among performers with disabilities, the degrees and types of disability are also diverse; thus, all scenes and works are generally composed and structured in accordance with each performer's characteristics and disabilities. Additionally, able-bodied performers support and assist performers with disabilities on stage. It was not easy for these performers to collaborate at the beginning of the project, and the performers even felt psychological barriers to such collaboration. However, the performers started to consider this challenge to be "surprisingly no problem and fun" once they began to create art and consolidate their style. One performer, Hikaru Furuya, mentioned the following points:

I have a mild degree of developmental disability and sometimes struggle in daily life. Therefore, I feel as if I am in a grey zone, but in the Shizuoka No-Borders, there are no barriers that separate able-bodied performers from performers with disabilities. Because we all aim to create an artistic performance together and enjoy it together. During the rehearsal, occasionally I cannot understand what I am requested to do when a teammate asks me to "please play as normal." For performers with disabilities, it is hard to understand what is normal or implicit instructions. Thus, I always try to accept my disability and explain how

I feel and understand the situation to others. I believe that stating the facts of my disability does not cause any irreconcilable situations, and actually, there are no “normal” things for all human beings. (Furuya interview, 2022)

Oka also described the style of the Shizuoka No-Borders as “a mixed performing art,” and this style represents the company's ability to convey impartial and open-minded messages to audiences and society more broadly (Oka interview, 2022). This style demonstrates the possibility of collaboration and communication regardless of disabilities in the context of the performing arts.

4. Analysis of barrier-breaking by creating silence

This section returns to the main research question: what types of messages does the silence created by performers with disabilities as part of their performing arts convey to audiences? Based on the case analysis, this section also demonstrates that a scene featuring unintended silence created by performers with disabilities can convey a significant message and function as a social action that promotes diversity and inclusion.

4.1. Hesitation and forgiveness

During the scene featuring silence, audiences feel ambivalent. Audiences are aware of the fact that some performers have some degree of disabilities and understand why they are unable to pull the toilet paper and react to the result properly. Thus, audiences experience hesitation regarding the situation. The audience may feel sorry for the performers with disabilities and experience suspense because the outcome of the scene is undetermined. The silence causes audiences to feel awkward and makes them hesitant to laugh or react to the scene.

However, audiences experience another feeling resulting from the silence: forgiveness. The “Toilet Paper Sumo” match is itself a comical situation. Therefore, audiences are permitted to laugh in response to the scene even when they feel awkward or hesitate to do so. The scene was designed and produced based on the concept of equality as merely one scene of the performance. Audiences may be unconsciously bound by the belief that they should not laugh at people with disabilities and their awkwardness. However, the scene highlights the fact that audiences can enjoy the comedy regardless of the presence of disabilities. The unintended (and likely awkward) silence thus causes audiences to feel forgiveness and allows them to laugh and enjoy the scene.

Perspectives, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the scene and the created silence can be accepted by each individual in a different manner. This tendency can be seen among the performers. Maho Natsume, a performer with the Shizuoka No-Borders, explained this situation as follows:

I am sure that "Toilet Paper Sumo" for performers with disabilities is undoubtedly a serious match. This is the most significant difference from able-bodied performers. There is humour in the fact that we all don't know what is going to happen on the stage; that's why audiences can concentrate on the situation with various feelings such as encouragement or suspense. Audiences may be interested not in the result but the process of the match. (Natsume interview, 2022)

From this perspective, the silence is instead created as a product of the combination of both performers with disabilities and able-bodied performers. The scene utilizes the cognitions of each performer and the combination of the various feelings involved. The created silence also implies different feelings. Hiroshi Nagashima, a performer with the Shizuoka No-Borders, explained this situation as follows:

The stage was surrounded by silence, but performers with disabilities are upsetting to the heart. There seems to be no response from the performers (with disabilities); however, they must feel chagrined at the match if the person lost. Sometimes they cried a bit once they came back backstage! (Nagashima interview, 2022)

Therefore, silence is created by a mixture of seriousness and twitchiness on the part of performers with disabilities. Such awkwardness conveys the reality of disabilities to audiences, but the performance, mixed feelings, humour, and relaxation result in a feeling of forgiveness. This created and unique silence dispels the audience's hesitation and conveys a message of “please, laugh at us.”

This situation is made possible because all the performers respect one another regardless of their disabilities, and audiences learn this fact by watching the scene.

4.2. Breaking barriers for both audiences and performers

Unintended silence is created by disability, and it is sublimed into humour and unique performance. The silence was awkward, and such an awkward silence is avoidable. However, the performers dare to utilize their disabilities in a scene and create silence unintentionally.

As a result of the initiatives taken by the Shizuoka No-Borders, the scene featuring unintended silence breaks certain barriers in society. In the context of silence, as discussed by Murray and Durrheim, the created silence involved in a scene of "Toilet Paper Sumo" can be considered to constitute a social action. The scene leaves the task of interpretation up to the discretion of the audience, and the ambiguity of the silence becomes manifest. Additionally, such an undetermined situation is created as a joint production involving multistakeholder engagement with the silence in the context of the performing arts. Thus, the significance of the scene depends on the audience, and the silence itself becomes an inexplicit subject of the scene.

However, the scene featuring silence conveys a critical message that disrupts unconscious bias, and so this scene can be viewed as succeeding in its task of functioning as a social action. What kinds of barriers does the scene break? The first such barrier is that between people with disabilities and able-bodied people; rather this category itself is erased by the scene. The mixed structure of the performance and the scene demonstrate the inclusive situation on stage, in which everyone participates in the performing arts together to entertain the audience. Thus, neither audiences nor performers need to consider the level of disability involved in the scene, and everyone is accepted in the theatre. Nagatsu explains the context of mutual collaboration among performers with disabilities and the surrounding people in the context of artistic activities as "complicity" (Nagatsu, 2018, pp. 174-176). Artistic activities are generally nonroutine and extraordinary; therefore, such situations can transcend labels and the stigmas associated with disabilities. In this context, the relationship and connections among performers with disabilities and their helpers involve their cooperation to express themselves via art projects. The production process associated with disabled arts is considered to be an area in which people who help individuals with disabilities are essential to implement artistic activities and convey a social message. However, the relationships among the Shizuoka No-Borders have a different context that does not distinguish between "people who are helped" and "people who help"; rather, all members of the company are simply performers. From this perspective, audiences can focus on individuals rather than on the classification or category of people with disabilities.

Second, audiences do not need to evaluate the performance as good or bad, i.e., as ugly or beautiful. They can simply enjoy the performing arts even if the created scene seems to be ugly or awkward when the performers have disabilities. Moreover, audiences are not required to view the performance as a disabled performance but can rather understand it as a situation of diversity. The mixed structure conveys a message that an inclusive society is realizable. Audiences, producers, performers, choreographers, and all related stakeholders can enjoy educational experiences via the creation process and the artwork itself. Thus, this initiative breaks a barrier with respect to the criteria for judging a performance based on the disabilities of the participants.

Thus, the created silence and the comprehensive initiatives showcase the true society and the values of diversity and inclusion. The scene could also function as a social action that conveys the significance of an inclusive society to audiences. The structure of the Shizuoka No-Borders reflects the reality of society; thus, through their performance, the performers express the fact that many synergetic effects can be achieved via diversity. Tatsuki Suguro, a performer associated with the Shizuoka No-Borders, evaluated this situation as follows:

The Shizuoka No-Borders and its style of performing arts have tremendous potential to work as a bridge between people with disabilities and able-bodied people. I assume that audiences must be stressed about whether they can laugh or not if all the performers are people with disabilities. The mixed structure of the Shizuoka No-Borders could contribute to eliminating prejudiced perspectives and embodying the value of inclusion. This situation may disabuse audiences of their hesitation and bias regarding people with disabilities. The presence of able-bodied performers facilitates the process of acceptance. While I can feel such a positive potential, I still see some hesitation and distance among stakeholders. I think that we still

have a long way to go to eliminate all barriers, not only among performers but also among audiences and society. That's why we must continue the initiative. If the barriers are eliminated, audiences react or laugh naturally at the scene no matter who performs it. Performers can also utilize their features, including their disabilities, as a character on stage, and they can produce unique works and have an impression on audiences. I want to contribute to making a situation in which everyone can laugh together as normal. However, it needs time to be realized. (Suguro interview, 2022)

The created silence implies that these performances are a significant step towards the creation of an inclusive society. For the Shizuoka No-Borders, everyone is equal on the stage. The silence serves as symbolic evidence of this fact.

5. Conclusion

This concluding section considers the ways in which the Shizuoka No-Borders shed new light on both the performing arts and society in the context of diversity and inclusion. This research endeavoured to answer the main question concerning the central message conveyed by created silence by examining a tangible scene in the context of the performing arts. The Shizuoka No-Borders have consolidated their unique style of artwork, which is neither inclusive nor exclusive and can thus express the reality of diversity and equality. In this context, the use of "silence" could play a significant role in a scene.

During the interview with Furuya, she mentioned the following:

I truly enjoy performing and dancing with everyone. I can just concentrate on enjoying myself because I am not a professional performer and don't need to think about any business or benefits. (Furuya interview, 2022)

At performances by the Shizuoka No-Borders, there are no biases, prejudices, or personal interests. All scenes are created naturally, and every characteristic of the performers, including their disabilities, is utilized naturally. For that reason, the scene of "Toilet Paper Sumo" could be performed. The silence itself was created unintentionally but could have a cathartic effect on audiences, thereby eliminating their unconscious biases and negative feelings towards performers with disabilities.

The findings of this study have important implications for future practice. The case study demonstrates that unintentional silence can affect a positive transformation in audiences' feelings towards people (performers) with disabilities, and this phenomenon can contribute to breaking emotional or mental barriers and raising awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion. Silence has tremendous potential to inspire audiences and to be utilized as a powerful tool that can convey a message to society in the context of the performing arts.

The main focus of this study is on the task of evaluating the effectiveness of the use of silence in performing arts; however, this analysis introduces further implications. First, the structure of "a mixed group," which consists of both performers with disabilities and able-bodied performers, establishes a new style of performing arts. This structure also generates value with respect to education concerning and raising awareness of an inclusive society. Second, this initiative highlights the significance of local activities. It could contribute to an expansion of opportunities for expression for people with disabilities. Ultimately, the initiatives organised by the Shizuoka No-Borders answer the question of how local activities can ensure the right of performers with disabilities to engage in cultural and artistic activities.

This study focused in greater detail on one specific scene featuring silence for intensive analysis. This limitation may have affected the assessment of the effectiveness of using silence in a scene in the context of the performing arts. Despite the limitations it faces, this research suggests opportunities for future study. This study contributes to our understanding of the potential of disabled performing arts to serve as a powerful tool that can allow us to foster awareness of diversity and inclusion as well as the real situation and barriers faced by performers with disabilities in local societies. An issue highlighted by this study is the fact that physical and mental barriers continue to inhibit performers with disabilities from pursuing their cultural and artistic activities. More information concerning support mechanisms, related legislation, and social practices could help establish a greater degree of accuracy with respect to this situation.

In this context, the initiatives taken by the Shizuoka No-Borders could serve as a model for other local communities. The group trains local performers by organising workshops and lessons in a mixed-group setting and provides individuals with opportunities to perform in public. Local activities could also make it feasible for performers with disabilities who cannot travel by themselves to participate in such activities. Throughout these activities, educational values can be encouraged and regional revitalization can be fostered. Further research could be conducted to investigate the transformation in the local society caused by the Shizuoka No-Borders as a means of examining the potential of a local approach involving performers with disabilities and considering the mechanisms of social support and legislation that are required for these initiatives.

As calls to establish an inclusive society are increasing in frequency, Japanese society must find a tangible way of realizing and understanding the real barriers to this goal. This study explores the concept of making silence as a way to highlight the potential of this approach, but the study can also serve as a significant first step in the task of finding a practical solution that can achieve the goal of establishing an inclusive society.

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