

Dis/ability on Display:

Performance, Practice, and Integration of Dancers with Physical Disabilities

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Introduction

My introduction to the intersecting worlds of dance and disability began in the studio when I started working as a teaching assistant for special needs children's classes at Mark Morris Dance Center. From a pedagogical perspective, this experience challenged me to find ways of effectively communicating movement language to students whose experiences of learning, moving, and communicating were previously unfamiliar to me. As I became more attuned to my students and their individual needs, I began to look beyond the scope of teaching, and wondered what kinds of training and performance opportunities existed for people in the disability community. My focus shifted to looking at dancers with physical disabilities in the context of performance when I came across Heidi Latsky's *On Display*, a site-specific dance installation that integrates both disabled and nondisabled dancers. The intimate experience of walking through a sculpture court of heterogeneous bodies made me wonder — what are the physical and artistic possibilities that arise in an inclusive, integrated space?

This paper will look at the work of four Western dance companies that integrate physically disabled and nondisabled dancers: AXIS Dance, Candoco, Heidi Latsky Company, and Joint Forces Dance Company. Through various integrative training and rehearsal techniques, forms of community outreach, and performances, the work of these companies creates opportunities for dancers in the disability community to take part in the conversation and ongoing evolution of concert dance, transgressing cultural stereotypes of disabled bodies and subjects. Integration defies the historically ableist culture of dance to redefine not only what dancing bodies can look like, but also who has access to training and performance opportunities.

This paper will trace the historical development of the Western classical ballet body to look at the cultural and institutional barriers integrated companies face in attaining mainstream recognition. Integration challenges the very idea of the prefix “dis” in “disability,” and problematizes hierarchical ideals of the body as expressed through language. The habitual rhetoric of ballet and modern dance technique must be revised to become both functional for different types of bodies and inclusive of individual movement experiences. This paper will examine the rehearsal and performance strategies these companies use to allow dancers who identify as wheelchair, cane, or crutch users, or amputees, for example, to embody and develop their individuality and physical potential. Finally, it will explore how integrated companies utilize collaboration and improvisation as tools for choreographic invention.

These four companies utilize integration to address historical and cultural barriers and to create new artistic opportunities. How does the mainstream, public nature of disabled dancers in Heidi Latsky’s *ON DISPLAY*, for example, comment on society’s obsession with the body as spectacle? How does Victoria Marks’ dance film *Outside In* enable its subjects to reclaim the sexuality, virtuosity, and allure of the disabled body through its overt eroticism? How have AXIS Dance and Candoco Dance Company transgressed cultural barriers to produce collaborative, interdisciplinary work that challenges traditional notions of physicality and virtuosity in performance? In what ways does the integration of disabled and nondisabled dancers in contact improvisation in Joint Forces Dance Company and DanceAbility International serve as a model for dance as an inclusive, egalitarian practice?

This paper will look at the integration of dancers with physical disabilities into mainstream Western concert dance to look at how integration reframes our ideas about aesthetic,

language, and meaning of the body in performance, how this broadens the scope of dance as a catalyst for social and political change, and how integration can open up new creative possibilities in the physical practice of choreography and movement invention.

Literature Review

The sources used in this paper include disability and performance studies scholarship, books, essays, interviews with choreographers and dancers, performance, promotional, and documentary videos, company websites, and the Dance/NYC Dance and Disability series of town hall discussions. The discussion of terminology and language surrounding disability outside of the medical model throughout this paper comes from disability studies scholar and psychology professor Simi Linton.¹

The discussion of the history of the Western theatrical dance body comes from a variety of historical and literary sources. It is centered on disability studies scholar Petra Kuppers' discussion of the historical construction of the "grotesque" body. Kuppers' book discusses the construction of "difference" in the context of performance, as she explores the history of freak shows and medical theaters and deconstructs the ableist culture of images surrounding disabled performers.² Numerous essays were helpful in my understanding of historical and theoretical models used to look at aesthetic and cultural meaning of the body in performance, most of which came a collection of essays edited by Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl.³

¹Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. New York and London: 1998

²Petra Kuppers, *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge*, New York and London: 2003.

³Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl, *Bodies in Commotion: Disability & Performance*. Michigan: 2005.

The discussion of technique, training, and rehearsal processes come primarily from two interviews: one with choreographer Heidi Latsky⁴ and another with AXIS company dancer Alivia Schaffer.⁵ Discussions of technique and training were also informed by the panel about education and access for dancers with disabilities as discussed primarily in the October Town Hall of the Dance/NYC series.⁶

Much of my own analysis of the work of these companies comes from company websites and videos, as well as attending Heidi Latsky's rehearsal and performance of her work *ON DISPLAY*. The discussion of contact improvisation and teaching methods comes from interviews with DanceAbility founder Alito Alessi.⁷

Background

Western theatrical dance has historically privileged the able body. Throughout the history of ballet, the ideal dancer as ethereal, light, strong yet effortless has informed ongoing iterations of the ballet body. Although modern dance has historically had broader ideals of bodily beauty and been generally more accepting of diverse bodies and subjects, the concert dancer has always been presumed to be able bodied. While ideas about the classical or ideal dancing body have changed over time to accommodate technical and aesthetic developments, the disabled body in performance and the work of disabled choreographers remain culturally marginalized.

⁴Heidi Latsky. Interview by Deborah Mausner, New York, NY. October 19, 2016

⁵Alivia Schaffer. Interview by Deborah Mausner, New York, NY. October 21, 2016.

⁶Dance/NYC Dance and Disability. New York, NY. October 17, 2016

⁷“All bodies speak: Alito Alessi at TEDxUOregon,” accessed December 2016.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3jJ2Y8_SPo

This marginalization is in part due to the prevailing medicalized model that informs the way we look at disability. In *Claiming Disability*, disability studies scholar, psychology professor, and activist Simi Linton writes, “Rendered an effect rather than a cause, disability is inactivated and muted... assumed to be something avoided or eliminated, cured or ameliorated, acted on rather than reacted to.”⁸ The medical model is a narrow lens that fails to acknowledge the social, political, and cultural factors that affect disabled people’s lives. In medicine, disability is defined by impairment and limitation; it treats people with disabilities as passive victims of tragic suffering. Disability is still seen in predominantly medical terms as something that needs to be cured — and not necessarily in a way that helps improve people’s lives — but one that cuts people off from access to mainstream society.

To begin to understand disability as a social phenomenon, Linton argues that we need to see disability as a critical category of analysis in the same way that we see gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and other forms of social identity and power. We need to acknowledge the critical importance of disability studies in the humanities. We also need to develop and promote language that can describe the unique sensory and proprioceptive experiences of disabled people, as the language we currently use is still very much seen in relational terms to the nondisabled majority.⁹ In mainstream society, the nondisabled majority still sets the terms for disabled people in educational and professional settings, as well as in architectural and infrastructural planning. One of the things we need to transgress these barriers, she argues, is to integrate more disabled voices into the community and centralize the disabled perspective.

⁸ Linton, *Claiming Disability*, 97-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

Integrated dance companies allow disabled and nondisabled people to work together and set the terms that work best for everybody. While in everyday life people with physical disabilities are usually relegated to private, far-off entrances and modes of transportation, in an integrated dance context, all bodies become visible in a shared, public space. Existing social hierarchies that privilege the abled body are deconstructed and dismantled. Bodies can be seen as autonomous and socially integrated as they move freely with each other.

The integration of dancers with disabilities into mainstream concert dance treats disabled subjectivity as full and independent, active rather than passive. Integration allows disabled dancers to present themselves to an audience on their own terms. Linton argues that “disability is more than a personal triumph over physical adversity; it is a life that consciously reckons with forces that oppress and control.”¹⁰ A socially integrated model is one that rewrites the stigmatized medical stereotype. Integration also puts the perspectives and experiences of performers with disabilities at the forefront of the viewer’s experience. It can lead us to develop language to talk about disability in terms that address people with disabilities as equal, autonomous subjects. Integration through dance serves as an ideal model of social equality in which concert dance as an institutional art form accommodates, celebrates, and harnesses diversity.

Part 1: Language Surrounding Disability

The existing vocabulary we have to discuss disability is in many ways a key part of the socio-political forces of oppression that marginalize people with disabilities. With limited

¹⁰ Ibid., 111.

terminology in existence, we are left with only a handful of terms, many of which are either derogatory and unfavorable, inadequate or insubstantial.¹¹

The prefix of *dis* in disability, diminishes the rest of the word that follows.¹² It marks a linguistic divide between the normative definition of ability — defined by the nondisabled majority — and the abilities of those who do not identify themselves as part of that majority. It serves as an encompassing term for all disabled persons with a variety of sensory experiences and ways of moving through the world. The term *ableism* itself helps us understand the dominance and ubiquity of the nondisabled perspective. Like racism or sexism, ableism is a systematic form of marginalization, in which people with disabilities are viewed as inferior to nondisabled people.

Linton explicitly defines a list of terms to describe people with disabilities. She covers those that are considered acceptable, those considered offensive, and those considered insider terms within disability community. The most offensive terms and phrases are those that reinforce the ableist divide, victimize, infantilize, and dehumanize the disabled body. The most outright nasty terms such as *dumb*, *retarded*, *cripple*, and *vegetable*, while generally eradicated from current conversation, reflect the history of institutionalization, eugenics, and discrimination against disabled people. Terms such as *abnormal* as opposed to normal, *handicapped*, *crippled*, *physically challenged*, and *special needs* are commonly used terms that group together, sanction off, and ostracize people with various disabilities. Linton notes that phrases such as to *overcome*

¹¹ Ibid., 8-33. The terminology used in this section comes predominantly from Linton's categorizations of terminology in her chapter "Reassigning Meaning."

¹² Ann Cooper Albright and Gabriele Brandstetter, "The Politics of a Prefix," *Choreographic Practices* (2015): 4.

disability impose the ableist wish for disabled people to assimilate and keep up, rather than demanding social change and accommodation. Other terms such as *afflicted with* or *suffering from* reinforce the stereotype that disabled people are in constant pain, and that they do not experience pleasure. Similarly, terms such as *wheelchair bound*, *ridden*, or *confined*, render the disabled body passive and subjugated, while more favorable terms such as *wheelchair user* incorporate the wheelchair with the body as an active subject. Other more friendly terms include *able-disabled* and *handicapable*. Within the disability community, terms such as *cripple*, *crip*, *gimp* and *freak* have been reclaimed and used as transgressive, though they are still considered offensive when used outside the disability community.

The terminology that society has created to describe people with disabilities is, needless to say, inadequate and incomplete. Many of the terms addressing people with mobility impairments define their bodies in terms of physical adversity, absence, or lack. The term *integration* itself can signal its own kind of othering, exoticization, or glorification of a different kind of viewing experience for an audience.¹³ Disabled dancers and choreographers might refute or challenge this term altogether in order to be seen and evaluated on equal terms. Throughout this paper the term *integration* will be used to describe work that incorporates disabled and nondisabled performers.

The integration of disabled dancers into mainstream performance and choreographic practice can help us develop new ways of thinking about movement language that accommodates

¹³ Sarah Whatley, “The Spectacle of Difference: Dance and Disability on Screen.” *International Journal of Screendance* (2010): 43. Whatley elucidates “The word ‘integrated’ poses another potential dichotomy... already the experience of the audience [is] colored by an expectation of bringing together two different components or categories of ‘normal’ and ‘other’.”

and captures the lived sensory experiences of people with disabilities. Currently the language and habitual rhetoric that we use in dance classes is inherently ableist. In an integrated context, using phrases such as “extend your right leg forward,” for example, may not be applicable to all students in the classroom. The inclusion of dancers with disabilities thus necessitates a reformation of the way we discuss, teach, and think about the language of dance technique. Integration provides an opportunity for language to evolve to describe dancers in their individual gaits, qualities of movement, or their use of wheelchairs, canes, or crutches — in ways that activate the body as a whole corporeal subject. Ideas about integration as it relates to dance technique and training will be further explored later in this paper.

Part 2: The “Classical,” the “Grotesque” and the Dancing Body

“Wide human variation is the norm rather than the exception. It is the ideology of ableism that tells us we should all look the same.”¹⁴

- Rosemarie Garland Thomson

Petra Kupperts argues that the category of “disabled” is a “phenomenologically normal experience, but one that is coded as ‘periphery’ rather than ‘center,’ as ‘abnormal’ rather than ‘normal’, from the outside.... thus a disabled person experiences her form of embodiment both as primary and secondary at the same time, as she is structured into the certainties and languages of the system (into) (a form of double consciousness-embodiment).”¹⁵ This tension between inner bodily experience and outside social and bodily inscription is reflected in the history of exploitation in popular entertainment. Kupperts describes the two main forms of theatrical spectacle to which disabled people have been historically confined as a) the “sideshow” or “freak

¹⁴ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists and the Dynamics of Staring,” *Bodies in Commotion: Disability & Performance*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 40.

¹⁵ Kupperts, *Disability and Contemporary Performance*, 14-15.

display,”¹⁶ in which performers were paid to entertain onlookers and make a spectacle of various medical conditions, and b) “the medical theater,”¹⁷ otherwise known as the operating room or the “operating theater,” in which patients were put on display and exploited in the context of medical practice.

Fairground entertainment was most popular in England and the U.S. throughout the nineteenth century. As a commercial enterprise, the freakshow sensationalized differently abled bodies, making spectacles of performers who were considered human freaks — as less than or other than human. While freakshow entertainers were highly paid for skilled work, the industry subsisted on the exoticization of its performers. Kuppers writes, “the freak on this early stage becomes the other that serves to heighten self-identity, allowing the audience to disavow and suppress aspects of self, constructing themselves as happy, restrained, appropriate, normal.”¹⁸ The sideshow audience experiences a mixture of horror and satisfaction as they gain newfound appreciation for their fortunate position.¹⁹ Hierarchical and binaristic relationships of self and other are reinforced as viewers exercise social dominance and performers profit from self-exhibition. Although the freakshow lost its popularity in the twentieth century due to changing moral attitudes and the rise of the disability rights movement, its residual effects can be seen in representations of disability in movies, television, and popular entertainment, in which disabled characters are traditionally sensationalized and underrepresented.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹ Ibid., 33.

The medical theater, as described by Koppers, has existed in the sphere of the operating room under the “diagnostic gaze” of medical doctors.²⁰ Historically rooted in studies of anatomy, in which spaces of scientific learning were transformed into “sites of theatrical spectacle,”²¹ the medical theater continues today as patients with disabilities, particularly with rare congenital conditions, report exploitative medical encounters in which they are utilized as specimens for learning and medical demonstrations.²² As discussed earlier, the prevailing medical model of disability denies disabled people their subjectivity and erases the social and cultural history that informs the way the disabled body is signified as deviant or abnormal. This history of oppression must be acknowledged in the context of disability in performance.

Bodily deviance has been theorized by the carnival and Russian folk culture critic Mikhail Bakhtin as the “grotesque” body, defined as “open, protruding, extended, secreting... [as] opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed and sleek, corresponding to aspirations of bourgeois individualism.”²³ Bakhtin also associates “grotesque realism” with the “grotesque reality of the marketplace, with its jugglers, acrobats... magicians, clowns... and people that would later be called ‘freaks.’”²⁴ Bakhtin’s *grotesque* body, a bodily reality that encompasses the history of freak show entertainers, is the antithesis of the classical, aristocratic

²⁰ Ibid., 39.

²¹ Ibid., 38

²² Ibid., 39.

²³ Ann Cooper Albright, “Strategic Abilities: Negotiating the Disabled Body in Dance,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* (1998): 6.

²⁴ Nora Ruck, “Some Historical Dimensions of the ‘Dialogical Body’: From Bakhtin’s Dialogical Grotesque Body to the Monological Body of Modernity,” *Psychology & Society* (2009): 11.

body. It is the body of low class entertainment, as opposed to the body of the high court — the “honorable” and “upright” body through which the regimes of classical ballet originated.²⁵

In Saint-Hubert’s mid-seventeenth century guide to creating a successful ballet, he states that there are two kinds of ballets: “the serious” and “the grotesque.”²⁶ Establishing bodily hierarchies at the outset, Saint-Hubert does not outright exclude disabled bodies but separates their assigned roles as entertainers. He writes, “it is possible to have many types of individuals dance in ballets, even lame persons, who in certain things can be as successful as others.”²⁷ He goes on to iterate that the finest dancers should be reserved for the most complicated steps and lengthy sections. He distinguishes the *fine*, able dancers, who should be used for “serious entrées,” which will be danced with “handsome costumes,” from the *lame*, whom he relegates to “comical entrées with grotesque costumes” which “ought to be short.”²⁸ He also describes the appearance of people miming disability: “I have seen others representing limping or maimed people who, after coming on stage with crutches, dance a little, then throw away their canes and crutches, and caper about as if ballet could miraculously cure the halt and lame.”²⁹ Saint-Hubert’s anecdotes describe seventeenth-century ballet as a theater of spectacle, much like the freakshow, that reinforces the separation between self and other, between able and disabled. It also demonstrates the clear association of body with class status, distinguishing the low, comical, and grotesque, from the high, serious, classical body.

²⁵ Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl, *Bodies in Commotion: Disability & Performance* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 73.

²⁶ De Saint-Hubert, “How to Compose a Successful Ballet,” *Dance Perspectives*, 20 (1964): 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

The classical and the grotesque are also connected to a social obsession with bodily control — that is, control over the body’s mortality, aging, and other bodily processes.³⁰ This is evident both in contemporary society and in the history of the Western theatrical dance body. In dance, the classical body is equated with physical control, grace, and technical virtuosity. In the theatrical space of some concert dance — ballet in particular — ideals of classicism, effortlessness, and ease function to conceal effort, exhaustion, and fatigue. This serves to ease the “cultural anxiety that the grotesque body will erupt (unexpectedly) through the image of the classical body, shattering the illusion of ease and grace by the disruptive presence of fleshy experience.”³¹ Although the emergence of postmodern and contemporary dance forms have in some ways worked to shatter the classical illusion, cultural anxiety continues to resist any display of the “body out of control.”³² This is evident in the kind of critical backlash received by companies who fully acknowledge and embody bodily mortality and the grotesque.

The trope of the grotesque as of a distinctly lower cultural status, and as a stigmatized cultural representation of the body as mortal, has continued to the present day in the way we view inclusive and integrated dance. The exoticization and sensationalism of the disabled body is reinforced by the reality that “people with physical impairments are hypervisible, instantly defined by their physicality” and therefore must negotiate “two areas of cultural meaning: invisibility as an active member in the public sphere and hypervisibility and instant categorization as passive... victim in much of the popular imagination.”³³ One example of this

³⁰ Ann Cooper Albright, “Moving Across Difference,” *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, (1997): 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Kuppers, *Disability and Contemporary Performance*, 49.

association of disability with passive victimhood appears in former dance critic Arlene Croce's controversial refusal to embrace what she termed "victim art," which she defined in part as "dancers with physical deformities who appear nightly in roles requiring beauty of line."³⁴ One can trace a historical change from the grotesque performer as comical and sensational to the disabled performer as pitiful and therefore unwatchable. Both of these modes of understanding the meaning of the body in performance are exclusive, dismissive and reductive. Croce's article was written in connection to Bill T. Jones' *Still/Here* (1994), a piece that tells the stories of people living with terminal illnesses. Croce's terms of refusal render invisible any performers who do not fit into her narrow category of normativity. Alastair Macaulay has used Croce's "victim art" as a means of refusing to acknowledge integrated dance as art for its own sake.³⁵ Physically integrated dance has struggled for recognition in dance criticism on terms that evaluate aesthetic and meaning beyond the premise of victimhood. Critics who fall back on descriptions such as "inspirational" certainly don't do any justice to these artists either. It is the medical model, contingent on victimhood, and the ableist imposition of *overcoming* disability, that devalues the work of disabled and integrated artists.

Ann Cooper Albright, disability scholar and performer, emphasizes that "watching disabled bodies dancing forces us to see with a double vision, and helps us recognize that while a dance performance is grounded in the physical capacities of a dancer, it is not limited by them."³⁶ In a society that "conflates subjectivity with physical mobility" the disabled body has historically

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁵ Louis Levene, "Dance: Victims of their own success," *Independent* (1997). In a 1996 Financial Times review of a Candoco performance, critic Alastair Macaulay patronizingly writes, "As sociology, as therapy, as education, it could hardly be more enlightened. As serious aesthetic experience, however, it is a non-starter... What CandoCo offers is victim art."

³⁶ Albright, "Moving Across Difference," 2.

been relegated to the bottom of the social and class ladder in the hierarchy of the theater.³⁷

Watching bodies move on their own terms in an inclusive dance performance is a political exercise of autonomy as expressed through movement; it is a means of physical and subjective liberation that presents the viewer with an experience of disability outside of the dominant cultural narrative.

Disabled performers have been historically defined by their deviant relationship to the nondisabled majority, either as spectacles of exoticism or as tragedies of victimhood. In deconstructing these socio-historical ideologies of the classical and the grotesque, we begin to recognize the cultural barriers that integrated companies face in acquiring mainstream recognition. As more diverse bodies are included in the historically exclusive institution of concert dance, cultural critics must open up discussions that facilitate productive modes of analysis and revise the dominant ableist standards of aesthetic value. These revisions will produce an egalitarian awareness of difference not as deviant, but as part of the infinite variation of physical possibilities in the realm of human existence.

Part 3: On Staring and “Virtuosity”

The experience of attending a dance concert involves a negotiation of power dynamics between the viewer and performer. Viewing dance is premised on visibility — on looking at the body in performance. In “Dares to Stares,” Rosemarie Garland Thomson defines the cultural “stare,” as it is used by nondisabled people, consciously or not, to “make sense of the unanticipated and inexplicable visual experience” upon encountering a visibly disabled person.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁸ Thomson, “Dares to Stares,” 30.

Different from looking, scanning, surveying or casually glimpsing, the stare “starkly registers the perception of strangeness and endows it with meaning.”³⁹ In the context of viewing disability in performance, the act of looking comes into tension with the cultural dynamic of the stare. The stare is intrusive and pathologizing: a social marking of difference and otherness, and an attempt at diagnosing impairment. Staring is generally forbidden from social etiquette, yet a frequent experience among people with disabilities. Just as the male gaze imposes normative heterosexual desire on the female subject, the ableist gaze marks the disabled subject as deviant from the norm.⁴⁰ Thus, the “stare” must be seen in intersectional terms — as interlocking with politics of gender, race, and class identity, as well as ability.

Disability on display in the context of performance endows the artist with power to transgress the cultural stare. The disabled artist in performance controls the terms of the exchange with his/her audience. The artist negotiates and orchestrates the encounter itself, and in so doing, controls the social dynamics at play. The act of putting oneself on display is in itself a form of transgression. Performance can unveil the dynamics of the stare by forcing the viewer to become the starrer, thus “marking the starrer as social transgressor.”⁴¹ While in society the starrer objectifies through the act of staring; in performance, the artist asserts subjectivity by controlling and exposing the dynamics of the stare.

Integrated dance has struggled for validation as a serious arts practice. Our current cultural framework often categorizes integrated work as “community dance” or “therapeutic

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁴¹ Thomson, “Dares to Stares,” 39-40.

practice.”⁴² The struggle for artistic validation comes in part from historically ableist definitions of virtuosity. Virtuosity is traditionally defined in terms of “mastery” and “expertise,” based on “excellence” that in some way exceeds the norm.⁴³ Virtuosity in performance traditionally develops when an individual excels beyond established notions of proficiency, and in so doing, changes our ideas about what is possible. In this way, virtuosity is contingent on a historical moment and defined by social and cultural context, as well as individual and collective standards.

The idea of the virtuoso disabled dancer is relatively unexplored. Due to our historically ableist definitions of understanding, the virtuoso disabled dancer is often framed by the medicalized notion of being physically able or virtuosic in spite of disability. Ableist notions of physical virtuosity continue to inform the way we view and write about dance. Former *Candoco* dancer David Toole, a double leg amputee, is known for performing rigorous choreographic work, able to support his full bodyweight on his hands and arms. Throughout his performance career, Toole was highly featured as a face of *Candoco*, known for his remarkable strength, speed, and seamless mobility. Many company reviews throughout the nineties reflect audience astonishment and amazement, as well as “traces of freak-show voyeurism” in reaction to seeing a man perform without legs.⁴⁴ Toole’s virtuosic abilities came at a cost, however, when he was advised by doctors to stop dancing because of the strain placed on his arms and shoulders. Fortunately he has been able to continue dancing with numerous companies including DV8,

⁴² Sarah Whatley, et al., “Validation and virtuosity: Perspectives on difference and authorship/control in dance,” *Choreographic Practices* (2015): 60.

⁴³ “Webster: Virtuosity definition,” accessed December 2016, (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virtuosity?fb_comment_id=10150116389018644_17483243#f1aeb21b695883c)

⁴⁴ Albright, “Moving Across Difference,” 18.

Stopgap Dance, and in the 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony. Toole is an example of a virtuoso disabled dancer whose virtuosic abilities are framed by ableist physical standards. Thus, in the context of audience reaction and general publicity, ableist standards of virtuosity can still be perpetuated through integrated dance.

Performance in an integrated context challenges us to both broaden and sharpen our definitions of virtuosity. As integrated dance becomes more widespread, we must be able to readily understand terrains of virtuosity outside of those premised on the idea of the able body. Marxist philosopher and semiologist Paolo Virno defines “virtuosic activity” as that which firstly, “finds its own fulfillment and its own purpose in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product,” and secondly “[any activity which] requires the presence of others; it exists only in the presence of an audience.”⁴⁵ Virno’s definition, as applied to dance, can allow not only for a more body-specific understanding of physical virtuosity, but also an understanding of virtuosity as it is developed through the artistic process itself. This model of virtuosity encompasses the virtuosic nature of putting integrated dance on display in performance. In this way, one form of virtuosity can also be a critique of ableist notions of virtuosity. As integrated dance continues to advance the field of physical and artistic practice, definitions of virtuosity become increasingly inclusive and expansive.

Part 4: Heidi Latsky Company on Display

Heidi Latsky began her professional career with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, a group known for its diversity and inclusion of unconventional bodies. Working with Jones made her realize that being an artist could be a platform for social justice and

⁴⁵ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles/New York: 2004), 1.

activism. During her time dancing with the company she describes performing with duet partner Lawrence Goldhuber: “We were so different-looking, we could just stand on stage and make an impact.” This understanding later influenced her own choreographic work.

She started working with dancers with disabilities when she was introduced to Lisa Bufano in 2006. Bufano, a former gymnast and performer, had become a bilateral below-the-knee and total finger-thumb amputee due to a life-threatening staphylococcus bacterial infection at the age of twenty-one.⁴⁶ Latsky describes Bufano as her muse: “She was so vulnerable, really open, but so fierce... and I realized that a lot of dancers lose that, or don’t even have that.” Bufano, during her time rehearsing with Latsky, was “completely present” as a performer. She had had no formal modern dance training. Latsky worked with Bufano for six months before touring Bufano’s solo, *Five Open Mouths*.

Through Bufano, Latsky met other people in the disability community, and garnered interest in working with people with various types of bodies, some of whom were not formally trained as dancers. Latsky explains, “It was like a snowball effect; the more I worked in an integrated way, the more interested I was.”

Latsky’s choreographic process changed when she started working with more dancers with disabilities. Starting out as a choreographer with nondisabled dancers, she would come into rehearsal with her own movement material. When she started worked in an integrated setting, however, she became less interested in her own movement and more interested in what the dancers could bring to the process. She discovered the unique strengths and tendencies of each of her dancers. When working with dancer Lawrence Carter-Long, who has cerebral palsy,

⁴⁶ “Lisa Bufano, artist,” accessed November 2016, <http://www.lisabufano.com/>

Latsky remembers him describing to her, “I fall really well because I fall all the time.” She incorporates things like this into her work through collaboration. Latsky describes a contemporary motto of the disability community: “Nothing about us without us.” It is very important to Latsky that she discusses everything with her dancers extensively and gives them agency as artists in the collaborative process.

Latsky started her company under the title of “The GIMP Project” in 2006, when she started working with integrated dancers on a series of performance works and outreach programs.⁴⁷ When asked about the future of GIMP, Latsky responded, “I’m trying to get rid of that name... we got a lot of flack. Disability organizations would refuse to see me.” Latsky saw the name initially as a “preemptive strike.” She explained that the main definition of “gimp” is “fighting spirit, vigor” and “interwoven fabric.” However, “gimp” has been used in a derogatory way to describe physical impairment. Disability organizations have had trouble getting on board with her use of the term. Considering the aforementioned issues surrounding disability and language, Latsky’s experience with using the word “gimp” as a nondisabled choreographer understandably provoked some controversy in the disability community. In moving forward, she will continue her work under the company name “Heidi Latsky Dance.” “After ten years of working with an integrated company,” she explains, “I don’t need to call it anything. It doesn’t matter what I do —we’re integrative. We’re inclusive.”

In Latsky’s *ON DISPLAY* the dancers occupy their own place in the space, moving mostly within their own kinesphere. They each take turns performing short solos, which sometimes overlap with others, and at other times occur on their own. This creates a popcorn

⁴⁷ “Heidi Latsky Company,” accessed November 2016, <http://heidilatskydance.com/company/>

effect in which movement appears, disappears, and reappears at different times throughout the space. Meandering through the sculpture court of bodies, the viewer can examine each individual dancer from all sides and angles. Between solos, the dancers alternate between subtle movement and stillness, keeping their eyes closed while slowly transitioning from one pose to the next. Upon arriving at their next pose, they open their eyes and remain frozen until it is their turn to perform their solo again.

In an open rehearsal at DANY Studios on October 17th, 2016, Latsky described her creative process as collaborative with the dancers, shaped under her choreographic directorship. She emphasized clarity and specificity as she directed the dancers through their solos, attending to each individual as to a fine-tuned instrument. The company is notably diverse, not just in terms of ability and dance background, but also in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity.

There are many variations of *ON DISPLAY* that have been performed nationally as well as internationally. *ON DISPLAY GLOBAL* began in 2015 on the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act as an annual initiative to commemorate International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3rd.⁴⁸ Latsky's *ON DISPLAY* Sculpture Court installation invites the viewer into the performance space, whereas some of the traveling *ON DISPLAY GLOBAL* performances maintain a more traditional separation between the audience and performers, depending on where they are performed. In all performances, especially the interactive ones, audience members are encouraged to take photographs and videos of the dancers to post on social media. Latsky's website describes the work as "a deconstructed art exhibit/fashion show and commentary on the body as spectacle and society's obsession with

⁴⁸ "Heidi Latsky Dance," last updated December 2016, <http://heidilatskydance.com/on-display-global/>

body image”⁴⁹ These performances aim to give exposure to inclusive dance work by virtue of being shown in public venues and by circulating documentation of the performances online.

Lastly, any individual choreographer or company can create their own versions of *ON DISPLAY* by applying through Latsky’s online forum. In this way, the initiative has traveled the globe, putting integrated dancers on display all over the world.

Part 5: Candoco & Victoria Marks’ *Outside In*

Candoco Dance Company is a professional dance company based in the UK. The first integrated company in the UK, it was founded in 1991 by Celeste Dandeker and Adam Benjamin. The company came out of a series of integrated workshops conducted at The Association for Spinal Injury Research, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (ASPIRE) in London. Under its original artistic directorship, the company commissioned over 30 new performance works from internationally renowned choreographers including Emily Claid, Javier de Frutos, Doug Elkins, Siobhan Davies, Fin Walker, Darshan Singh-Bhuller, Annabel Arden and Stephen Petronio.⁵⁰ Since 2007, the company has been led by artistic co-directors Stine Nilsen and Pedro Machado. They have continued to commission international work, notably including a restaging of Trisha Brown’s *Set and Reset*, which included disabled dancers for the first time.⁵¹ Candoco currently holds a partnership with Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance that aims to provide prevocational and vocational training for disabled students through to professional employment.⁵² The company’s “In Dialogue” strand hosts talks and workshops to discuss the

⁴⁹ “Heidi Latsky Dance,” last updated December 2016, <http://heidilatskydance.com/on-display-global/>

⁵⁰ “Background: Candoco Dance,” Accessed December 2016, <http://www.candoco.co.uk/home/about-us/background/>

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

creative process and provide a space for debate around dance, disability and aesthetics.⁵³ The company works to change the face of integrated dance through performance, choreographic innovation, and community outreach.

Victoria Marks' 1994 dance film *Outside In* features six original Candoco dancers, three disabled and three nondisabled.⁵⁴ The film is striking in its use of eroticism, sexuality, and gender fluidity. As the film opens, the viewer is introduced to each individual dancer as the camera scans down the line of faces, following the transmission of a kiss. From the start there are both heterosexual and same-sex couplings as the dancers kiss, taunt, sneeze, or blow air into each other's faces. Upon zooming out we see an unoccupied wheelchair roll out into an empty lot. The dancers then assemble as a group, and we see their bodies in full view.

We see each character as an individual occupying a unique presence in the group dynamic. They pair off into shifting duets, utilizing each other's bodies and chairs to partner, push, pull, roll, hold onto, and climb on each other. Dancer David Toole moves in and out of his wheelchair. In one early scene, Toole glides across a Warhol "Tango Dance Diagram," flirting with the camera, and marking along each footprint on his hands. When the group dances together as an ensemble, they move as one shifting image.

Through ongoing perspectival shifts of the camera, the viewer travels above, below, and around the dancers. Each scene seamlessly morphs into the next, strung together by motifs of transmitting, peering into, or peeling open. Two parallel lines traced by human fingers transform into the paint marks left behind from a rolling wheelchair. An abstract painting of a landscape

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "Outside In, 1994" Accessed December 2016, <http://www.margaretwilliamsdirector.com/outside-in>. The following description of *Outside In* comes from the online video of the film, which can be accessed through the link above.

morphs into a sea of the dancers' faces, their mouths and noses echoing the shapes of mountains. The camera fuses the fantastical and the real, uprooting the viewer from establishing any kind of grounding of spatial norms. Yet the images and themes are human and recognizable — the dancers taunt, flirt, embrace each other in a tango, or abruptly let go. In the ever-changing landscape, the ableist, voyeuristic stare is disrupted, allowing us to recognize each individual as integral to the whole.

Sarah Whatley warns that performance on screen gives rise to what she terms “the spectacle of difference,” which can happen on film when the viewer is not sharing the physical space of the performer.⁵⁵ A different kind of immersion takes place, in which the viewer acknowledges that s/he cannot be there, yet is immersed in sensing that s/he is there.⁵⁶ Another possibility that occurs, she argues, is that the spectator “meets the film in a complex space that allows for a shared somatic, kinaesthetic, intercorporeal, intersubjective and visceral involvement, which invites the viewer to identify with the dancing human subject/s.”⁵⁷ This can be said of *Outside In*, in which the viewer becomes enveloped in a fantastical landscape of morphing images and fully immersed in the world of the performers.

Dance on camera, she warns, presents a danger of being able to “gaze” and “stare” with voyeuristic permission. Marks' *Outside In*, however invites that gaze in order to subvert it, taunting the viewer with eroticism and flirtation. Marks' film foregrounds the dancers' subjectivity because it allows us to really see each dancer as an individual personality in the film's larger narrative. The viewer experiences the reality of each dancer's physical existence,

⁵⁵ Sarah Whatley. “The Spectacle of difference: Dance and Disability on Screen,” *The International Journal of Screendance* 1, no 1. (2010): 41.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 43.

and becomes enveloped in their virtual-physical presence in the space. The film emphasizes the dancers' autonomy as the choreographic material utilizes the physical potential of each individual body. *Outside In* also gives us an intimate glance at individual identity as expressed through eroticism, cross-dressing, sensual wit, and play.

In society, people with disabilities are desexualized and oppressed in their expression of sexuality. In addition to its use of eroticism, *Outside In* utilizes narrative play between reality and fiction, between real and constructed locations. This fantastical filmic reality points to the fictional nature of the social construction of disability itself. The film is a subversion of stigma and reclamation of identity. The ever-shifting nature of the camera's viewpoint invites the viewer's gaze and sparks curiosity in order to destabilize any pre-existing notions of disability.

In regards to dance and disability on screen, Whatley argues that the distance between subject and viewer on screen gives rise to distance and difference.⁵⁸ At the same time, however, certain filmic techniques of editing and visual proximity can bring the viewer into a more visually intimate experience with the performer than would happen when separated by a theatrical stage. As seen in *Outside In*, the viewer can become visually and sensorially immersed in the world of the film, which harnesses wholeness and integrity, rather than physical separation and distance.

The same ideas about screendance can be applied to promotional videos as well. Whatley argues that promotional videos for integrated companies themselves are "filmic spectacle(s)" characterized by the dancer's physical "gymnastic display," implying that the dancer has "overcome the limitations of disability."⁵⁹ This can certainly present a danger of

⁵⁸ Whatley, "The Spectacle of Difference," 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

playing into the spectator's awe and pleasure, which further stigmatizes disability as medical impairment, and extends the binary between nondisabled and disabled. The Candoco Dance Company trailer is a quick and flashy representation of the range of the company's theatrical work, with a strong emphasis on physical dynamics.⁶⁰ At the same time, it is a technique used with all promotional material to tap into movement that is flashy and dynamic, for advertising purposes. While there is a tension between the notion that disabled dancers should show off or display flashy feats in these videos in order to "keep up" with ableist standards of virtuosity, this could be said about any promotional company video, integrated or otherwise, and in that sense they can also vouch for full integration, to be seen just like any other dance company. Finally, the mediated experience of film can access a wider range of viewership, and can also be more easily shared and distributed than a live performance.

Part 6: AXIS Dance Company

*"The lope of a crutch feels to me as elegant as that of a gazelle; the push of a chair creates a glide akin to skating; a roll on the floor creates grounded-ness and a different understanding of the spine. I want to draw out the expressive capacity of disabled bodies and minds by acknowledging and actively drawing on the movement of impairment."*⁶¹

-Alice Sheppard

AXIS Dance Company was founded in 1987 in Oakland, California as the Disability Rights and Independent Living movements were gaining momentum, paving the way for physically integrated dance companies. Under Artistic Director Judith Smith, the company has produced over 75 works of repertory in collaboration with renown contemporary choreographers

⁶⁰ "Candoco Dance Company: Cutting Edge Dance 1991-2016," accessed December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/user/CandoCoDanceCompany>

⁶¹ "Alice Sheppard: About," last modified February 2016, <http://alicesheppard.com/about/>

including Bill T. Jones, Stephen Petronio, Joe Goode, Victoria Marks, Meredith Monk, Margaret Jenkins, Ann Carlson, and Joan Jeanrenaud.⁶² In accordance with their mission to “change the face of dance and disability,” AXIS has toured over 100 cities both nationally and internationally, and has significantly expanded their education and outreach programs, Dance Access, and Dance Access/KIDS!, to provide more training opportunities for disabled dancers.⁶³

In an interview with AXIS dancer Alivia Schaffer, she discusses the ins and outs of the company rehearsal process and her own experiences as a nondisabled dancer dancing, for the first time, in a physically integrated company.⁶⁴ Schaffer joined AXIS in August 2016 after two years of touring and performing with DanceWorks Chicago. In our conversation, she describes the use of heightened “sensory listening” in her first few rehearsals with AXIS in order to learn partnering techniques on dancers with different bodies and with different centers of weight. She describes the daily company warm-up classes as collaborative and composition-oriented: “In our warm-up classes we do a lot of material generation as part of our exercises... making trios or doing things to warm up our artistic sides.” She also notes the company’s use of contact improvisation as a primary source of engagement within the company and with the larger dance community. AXIS holds monthly community jams open to the public led by company members on a rotating basis, creating regular opportunities for integrated dance in the community.

AXIS, like most touring contemporary dance companies, performs a combination of set repertory and new work each season. In setting old repertory on new bodies, choreographers and former dancers often return to help re-stage pieces and reformat movement on different bodies.

⁶² “AXIS Dance: About,” last modified December 2016, <http://www.axisdance.org/about>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Alivia Schaffer, Interview October 21, 2016.

The company performs a combination of site-specific and theatrical concert work. Recently the company reached out to find twenty disabled and nondisabled dancers in the community to perform a large scale site-specific piece. “AXIS advocates for training opportunities for disabled dancers,” Schaffer explains. “[It’s important] for the company to engage outside of their bubble.... To make sure they are active members of the dance community.” Site-specific work “gets the visual image out in the world,” putting integrated dance in the public sphere.

The highly collaborative nature of the creative process creates ample opportunities for movement invention. Schaffer describes the exciting experimentation that comes with interacting with different bodies and with utilizing the movement of wheelchairs. “As a choreographic brain it’s very interesting... It forces me to engage with things that I never would have thought of with two nondisabled dancers in the room.” At the same time, she finds her experience in rehearsals with AXIS comparable to other experimental choreographic processes: “Just as with all collaborative work, the movement comes with identifying and responding to the shape of your partner’s body” In other words, “It’s just another form of risk-taking and experimentation that is at the root of *all* choreography... it’s our culture that makes it seem more radical and innovative.”

In regards to language surrounding disability, Schaffer talks about habitual rhetoric in the dance classroom, which must be reframed to function in an integrated context: “We’re ultimately given these steps — a plié is a bend, rond de jambe is a circle of a limb, you have a stretch, a cut, a slice, a strike — and ultimately if the disabled dancers can’t do some of those things, the goal is to identify the most important and the truest function of the movement... what is this movement at its purest form, what is the actual function of this step? You have to identify it and

adhere to it in a way that makes sense to you.” The company discusses and refines their movement language on a regular basis: “each day a company member will give a portion of an exercise 10-20 minutes... we break it down and talk about the rhetoric.” Further, thinking about movement in this way also changes the role of the dancer in the classroom. “It ultimately makes a smarter dancer,” Schaffer explains, “because it’s not about monkey see monkey do, but ultimately it’s understanding a science... [it creates] a world of dancers who make choices.”

The conversation around dance technique and providing training opportunities for disabled dancers also raises questions about defining technical proficiency for disabled dancers. “As a company,” Schaffer explains, “[our job involves] identifying where the line [is] between disabled dancer-in-training and professional dancer.” While for nondisabled dancers who come and audition, it’s quite clear whether or not somebody is right for a project, it can sometimes be challenging to find that same clarity for professional disabled dancers. Schaffer connects this back to training opportunities: “I think ultimately if more disabled people have the opportunity for training at the elite vocational level, there will be a clearer line for disabled dancers at the professional level.” The issue surrounding education and training opportunities for disabled dancers came up numerous times throughout our conversation, which speaks to AXIS’ mission not only to change the face of integrated dance in performance, but also to create training opportunities for disabled dancers and broaden the scope of integration at large.

Part 7: Contact Improvisation and Joint Forces Dance Company

“A group including various disabilities is like a United Nations of the senses. Instructions must be translated into specifics appropriate for those on legs, wheels, crutches, and must be signed for the deaf. Demonstrations must be verbalized for those who can’t see, which is in itself a translating skill, because English is not a very flexible language in terms of the body.”⁶⁵

-Steve Paxton

⁶⁵ Steve Paxton, “3 Days: DanceAbility Workshop, 1991” *Contact Quarterly* (1992): 13.

Contact improvisation was developed by Steve Paxton and other Judson alums in the early 1970s, and has since been used as a practice by all kinds of dancers with a range of movement backgrounds, abilities, and experiences. Grounded on principles of physical touch, sensory listening, and mutual weight dependence, contact improvisation teaches the practice of rolling, sharing weight, leading, following, listening, trusting, balancing, and learning how to fall safely. Contact also teaches disorientation, “reorienting the senses away from the dominant visual mode” and shifting performance from “something viewed to something participated in.”⁶⁶ Contact has no end objective nor end goal — it is about the experience of movement as it is happening in each moment. In this way, contact improvisation valorizes different skills and objectives than those of standardized dance techniques and dismantles bodily hierarchy. As a practice, contact prioritizes safety, dialogue, and mutual support, creating an open-endedness that allows anybody to participate.

DanceAbility is a teaching method founded in 1987 by Alito Alessi and Karen Nelson that uses improvisational dance practices to promote artistic expression and exploration between people with and without disabilities.⁶⁷ DanceAbility and its accompanying performance troupe, JointForces Company use contact improvisation as a method of teaching inclusive and integrated dance. DanceAbility has hosted integrated gatherings around the world, bringing together mixed-ability participants both nationally and internationally. In 1997, Alessi developed the DanceAbility Teacher Certification course, expanding integrated practices to teach participants

⁶⁶ Melissa C. Nash, “Beyond Therapy,” In *Bodies in Commotion: Disability & Performance*. Michigan, (2005): 192-193.

⁶⁷ “DanceAbility International,” accessed December 2016, <http://danceability.com/history.php>.

of all ages. DanceAbility uses contact improvisation as a primary teaching tool in its workshops, making dance accessible to participants with a variety of disabilities.

Alessi explains that his teaching principle is to “teach the same information to everybody” and change the “method of presentation” to accommodate specific populations.⁶⁸ In a typical DanceAbility workshop, the class begins with sitting in a circle in silence. Alessi explains, “all movement is relative to the person doing it.”⁶⁹ There are no standard definitions of what it means to walk, jump, move quickly, or move slowly, for example. The classes work on the basis of four principles: “Sensation (self), Relationship (other), Time (community), and Design (environment).”⁷⁰ This methodology uses principles upheld in contact improvisation, using touch as a primary form of communication. The workshops also accommodate individuals who cannot or prefer not to be touched, as well as individuals who cannot or prefer not to follow. “We are all connected,” Alessi reiterates.⁷¹ In this way the integrated experiences cultivated in DanceAbility workshops serve as a larger social model for an inclusive society.

While integration does not necessarily translate to equality due to predominant ableist standards of virtuosity and cultural stigmatization, the act of contact improvisation allows for fully equal participation between two bodies. Seamless lifts and transitions are only physically possible when both people are participating equally, feeling each other’s weight and centers of gravity. In *Common Ground*, a 1989 documentary about Joint Forces Dance Company featuring an integrated community jam, one man in a wheelchair remarks, “I learned than I can work with

⁶⁸“All bodies speak: Alito Alessi at TEDxUOregon,” accessed December 2016.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3jJ2Y8_SPo

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

somebody else, that I can be supportive, that people can crawl on top of me, and not feel afraid about my frailness or feel that they have to be careful about me, that — it's working together.”

Contact improvisation on an emotional level emphasizes going beyond one's comfort zone, while sharing an experience of supporting and being supported. In these ways it is an ideal method for teaching integrated dance classes, as well as generating movement material in an integrated space.

Part 8: A Look at the Future of Integrated Dance Training

In the third of a series of town halls on Dance and Disability hosted by Dance NYC, Victoria Marks and David Dorfman discussed the future of integration in dance education.⁷² In a panel moderated by Alice Sheppard, the three discussed the lack of training opportunities available for dancers with disabilities in the US, and worked through some challenging questions regarding technique, training, and accessibility.

In regard to technique, the three discussed reframing ideas about technical mastery that can be codified without necessarily being “transmittable” or repeatable. Their ideas about technique as “body specific” and particular to the individual correspond with those shared by AXIS dancer Alivia Schaffer. Similarly, the three described the role of a dancer as active interpreting or translating agent, rather than a “mime striving towards a bodily ideal.” Rather than asking the question: “To whom do I reference my body?”, the disabled dancer in the integrated classroom asks, “How do I attend to my own experience?”

⁷² Dance/NYC Town Hall Series: October 17, 2016, New York, NY. The information provided in this chapter comes from the conversation generated by Alice Sheppard, Victoria Marks, and David Dorfman, as well as from audience members in the corresponding Q&A.

In a discussion of current obstacles and roadblocks, the three agreed that institutions need to make major improvements in basic accessibility to buildings across campus. Other roadblocks include the idea of dance education itself as a “standardization” of movement practice. Further, while educational opportunities in various art forms exist for children with disabilities, this rarely extends into post-secondary education. It is incumbent on undergraduate and graduate dance programs, therefore, to find ways to make their departments accessible. In other words, it is the responsibility of insiders to expand before outsiders can enter. Additionally, expanding requires affirmative action through the admissions process.

In regards to solutions around technique, the three describe the development of “body knowledge” as fundamental to a dancer’s understanding of being in his/her own body. Further, expanding education could start with developing chair techniques or crutch techniques, for example, in which more experienced disabled dancers pass on and standardize this information. Both Dorfman, who teaches in the dance department at Connecticut College, and Marks, who teaches in the World Arts and Cultures/Dance department at UCLA, recognize these obstacles around disability and dance training, but they are excited about the idea of expanding their outreach.

An audience member in the Q&A following the panel asked: “What does disability dance culture look like? Where is the Ballet Hispanico of disability dancers?” This question raises fundamental concerns about the future of dance and disability, pointing to a crucial need for more institutional support. This question also gives us hope, as existing training models have historically made dance accessible to a variety of marginalized communities. Dance/NYC is

paving the way for funding and support of integrated dance work in New York City.⁷³ Integrated dance needs advocacy, funding, research, and continued dialogue now more than ever.

Fortunately, this is already happening. Integrated dance companies will continue to take the stage, challenging our ideas about technique, training, practice, and performance.

Conclusion

Integrated dance challenges the way we view disability, allowing us to deconstruct the semantic “dis” that has socially and historically marginalized disabled dancers through exclusive, ableist cultural norms. Integration challenges the way we understand and think about the history of the Western theatrical dance body, the prominence of ableism in the dance world, language around disability, and daily habitual rhetoric used in the dance classroom. Thinking about integration reframes the very definition of dance technique — what it aims to codify and accomplish, and whom it is designed to train. It also forces us to rethink the role of the dancer in the classroom — as active movement interpreter, translator, and collaborative agent of creation.

Integration reframes the way we think about virtuosity and spectacle, aesthetic, and the meaning of the body in performance. It challenges the job of dance critics who view and write about dance to find a more supportive, inclusive language and an adequate mode of critical analysis to discuss integration. In rehearsal and practice, improvisation and collaboration open up infinite possibilities for movement invention and creation, made possible only by the presence of mixed-ability bodies in the room. Further developments in teaching methodologies and

⁷³ “Dance/NYC’s Dance, Disability, Artistry Fund” accessed December 2016, <http://www.dance.nyc/news/2016/08/DanceNYCs-Disability.-Dance.-Artistry.-Fund-/>. The Dance, Disability, Artistry (DDA) Fund, supported by the Ford Foundation, is providing grants of \$30,000-\$15,000 to support production costs for integrated dance performance(s) in the metropolitan New York City area from January 2017 through March 2018.

increased institutional support will lead to more ways of making dance an inclusive and accessible practice worldwide.

While this paper focuses on some of the important integrated work that already exists, it by no means provides a comprehensive view of the breadth of influential work that has changed the face of dance and disability. Future research on this topic would benefit from the incorporation of more interviews and source materials. In its present form, this paper will hopefully provide readers with an introduction to some of the discourse surrounding concert dance and physical integration.

Finally, integrated dance deserves cultural validation and mainstream recognition, not as therapy, community outreach, or niche dance, but as art for its own sake. Integration celebrates and harnesses diversity and serves as a model for the future of an inclusive society and educational system. Diversity and integration of people of all identities have fueled and shaped the field of concert dance for centuries. Integration of dancers with disabilities is thus the natural direction for the future of concert dance as a wide-ranging, inclusive, egalitarian practice.

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