

Article

Differences in Itself: Redefining Disability through Dance

Carolien Hermans

Art and Economics, Utrecht School of the Arts, 3500 BM Utrecht, The Netherlands; E-Mail: carolien.hermans@hku.nl

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Abstract

This paper brings together two different terms: dance and disability. This encounter between dance and disability might be seen as an unusual, even conflicting, one since dance is traditionally dominated by aesthetic virtuosity and perfect, idealized bodies which are under optimized bodily control. However, recently there has been a growing desire within dance communities and professional dance companies to challenge binary thinking (beautiful-ugly, perfect-imperfect, valid-invalid, success-failure) by incorporating an aesthetic of difference. The traditional focus of dance on appearance (shape, technique, virtuosity) is replaced by a focus on how movement is connected to a sense of self. This notion of the subjective body not only applies to the dancer's body but also to disabled bodies. Instead of thinking of a body as a thing, an object (Körper) that is defined by its physical appearance, dance is more and more seduced by the body as we sense it, feel it and live it (Leib). This conceptual shift in dance is illustrated by a theoretical analysis of *The Cost of Living*, a dance film produced by DV8.

Keywords

dance; difference in itself; disability; Körper; Leib; lived body; lived experience

Issue

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1. Introduction

It is a surprising fact that philosophers and cognitive scientists took quite a long time to acknowledge the importance of the body. The devaluation of the body governed most metaphysical thought and perhaps even most philosophical thought until at least the time of Nietzsche. More recently one can see an explicit and nearly universal rejection of Cartesian dualism (Gallagher, 2000). The body has been reinserted into philosophical thinking and it's now widely acknowledged that the body is crucial for our intersubjective being in the world.

If the 'normal' body is now appreciated in philosophical thinking, the disabled body is, however, still negated and ignored within a society of normalization (Foucault, 1980). "Disability is a deeply contested term used to describe individuals (or a people?) that are in a position of difference from a centre" (Kuppers, 2003, p. 5). The term disability is associated with disease, illness,

tragedy, and loss. The term is not value-free: alongside the benefits, stereotyping, harassment, and hatred are still commonplace.

Even more importantly, the body of the disabled person is largely absent in Western theatrical dance. The disabled body is marginalized within the predominantly able-bodied dance community. Western theatrical dance has traditionally been structured by a very narrow vision of a dancer's body (white, long-limbed, flexible, thin, able-bodied) and by strict aesthetic structures and representational codes that suppress and devalue bodies that don't fit into normal categories.

This paper addresses the need to incorporate the disabled body in Western theatrical dance discourse, specifically with regard to screendance. For too long the focus has been on idealized bodies that strive for perfect bodily control and that move within the vocabulary of standardized aesthetic movements. It is time to rethink these normative aesthetic standards and to include a diversity

of bodies with idiosyncratic movement styles, in order to embrace differences. By deconstructing traditional representational codes of Western theatrical dance and by showing other bodily realities, we can redefine and enrich our notion of the ‘normal’ body.

Despite its bodily regimes, dance can also provide opportunities to question cultural and normative standards of what a body should look and feel like. In daily life our bodily experiences are hidden below the surface most of the time. In dance however, we share the bodily, that is, we share somatic experiences in a playful, imaginative, and expressive manner.

Dance is a social encounter: it’s a place where we share meanings with each other on a bodily level. It’s a place where the private and the public meet (Kuppers, 2003). Dance mediates and has the power to construct and deconstruct social meanings; it has the potential to create spaces in which fixed identities and normative standards suddenly become unstable and uncertain. This is due to the fact that dance produces embodied, living knowledge that is always in flux:

“The intersection of dance and disability is an extraordinarily rich site at which to explore the overlapping constructions of the body’s physical ability, subjectivity, and cultural visibility that are implicated within many of our dominant cultural paradigms of health and self-determination.” (Albright, 2001, p. 1)

The dance film *The Cost of Living* (2004) by DV8 is an example of this potentially rich encounter between dance and disability. The film is an adaptation of a stage production that takes David Toole, a double-amputee dancer, as its main character. In line with Overboe (1999), I will argue that the lived experience itself offers a radical way to explore disability in terms of differences, subjectivity, and cultural visibility. Watching a disabled dancer like David Toole forces us to see with “a double vision, and helps us to recognize that while a dance performance is grounded in the physical capacities of a dancer, it is not limited by them” (Albright, 2001, p. 1). I will use the terms Leib and Körper (Overboe, 1999) to analyze the way in which, in the dance film, we slowly move away from objectified standard bodies—bodies as efficient machines—to lived bodies that are made of flesh, are real and that are different in themselves.

The following research question is central to this paper: How can we rethink disability within the field of screendance by using the phenomenological notions of Leib and Körper? I will first discuss the theoretical difference between Leib and Körper, two concepts that are embedded in the phenomenological tradition. Then I will discuss how the intersection of screendance and disability can be an extraordinary site to explore these two concepts (Leib and Körper). Subsequently I will discuss three scenes from *The Cost of Living*: in all these scenes we—as spectators—experience a shift between Körper and Leib. In the conclusion, I will return to my research question

and discuss how the notion of Leib can draw attention to an aesthetic of difference in dance. An aesthetic that incorporates a diversity of bodies: bodies that tell their own lived narrative.

2. Leib and Körper

Looking intuitively at these two concepts, saying them aloud and listening to them carefully, the concept of Leib has a more personal connotation, while Körper coincides with the objective, anatomical shape of the body:

- A Leib can be imperfect: with scars, birthmarks, fat, wrinkles, a missing leg, a crooked back;
- A Leib is a unit, self-awareness without distance, the familiar without alienation;
- A Leib is the inner-felt, lived body;
- A Leib is the experience of sensing oneself as being sensed (Slatman, 2007, 2009);
- A Leib is a way of being, an existence in the world, while Körper, under the influence of normative standards, becomes a suit in which a human being exists on earth (Wijk, 2014).

The concepts of Leib and Körper both find their origins in the phenomenological tradition (Overboe, 1999). According to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Körper refers to inanimate life—the Cartesian *res extensa*—while Leib indicates the contrary, namely, animated life (Slatman, 2007). Körper is the image of the body. Körper is the body that is seen by others, an object, a thing with physical qualities, while the Leib is the body that I experience, a physical experience of being me. Slatman (2009, p. 120) describes the distinction as follows: “The Körper is the body that is seen, and the Leib is the body that is seeing. My body is not only a thing that can be seen but it is also seeing. It is a Leib because this ‘seeing’, while entangled with movement and space, is not a (Cartesian) mental way of seeing, but rather an embodied seeing”. In other words, a Leib refers to my own living body as I experience it from within, while the Körper refers to the body that is being seen from the outside.

Disabled bodies in our society are often perceived in terms of Körper. By opposing the disabled to the abled (the abnormal versus the normal), the disabled body is reduced to a thing to be looked at, even stared at. Under the gaze of the social other, the disabled body is constructed and filled with pre-existent expectations and by stereotypical thinking. This results in a process of exclusion: the disabled body is reduced to a predetermined subjectivity that leaves no room for the ground-zero experience of the body as a Leib (the body that lives, experiences, and resonates with others). According to Overboe (1999), the concept of Körper reduces the handicapped body to a classification that has a normative effect. The outer appearance of the handicapped body determines its value: from imperfection, a lack of control of the body, and vulnerability, to pain and death, or the heroism of

people who have conquered their handicap. In this way, handicapped people are depicted as less human or too human, but rarely as ordinary people who do ordinary things and have ordinary desires (Oliver, as cited in Overboe, 1999).

However, there is more at stake here. Firstly, the normalizing external gaze forces people with a disability to 'have' a body, that is, to relate to their own body as being a Körper. Secondly, everyday routines no longer serve as a way to relate subconsciously to their own body (the body as a Leib) or as a way to sense the body in a pre-reflective state. Daily bodily habits and routines usually force the body into pre-subjective agency—in affects and sensations. In encountering the daily environment, the body responds in ways that are unnoticeable or undetectable by the conscious mind (Berger, 2013). However people with a disability are often forced to relate consciously to daily routines because of pain or the effort it requires to accomplish certain actions (such as taking a shower, going to the toilet, getting dressed etc). Access to the pre-reflective experience of the body is not easy for people with a disability. Although new routines and embodied ways of being may be developed over time, this requires a negotiation between the body and the environment and often forces the embodied experience to become reflective and subjective. Dance can help gain access to purely physical sensations, affects, and embodied intensities (in experiencing the body as a Leib). This is not to say that dance can solve the complex relationship between being disabled and the suppressing forces of the social environment but it can be helpful in tuning in to the inner-felt dynamics of the body as it is lived and experienced.

3. Dance, Screendance, and Disability

Dance is the art form par excellence in which communication takes place on a non-verbal level. In dance we engage with ourselves and with others through the kinesthetic (Daly, 1992; Smyth, 1984). This experience is a first-person experience, that is, we live the movement and as we live it we understand it and give meaning to it. Experiencing self and others—in and through movement—also includes the intentions and affects that flow back and forth between the agents that are involved. Kinesthetic experiences are thus always connected with a sense of self and a sense of otherness.

Foster (2011), Reason and Reynolds (2010), and Wildschut (2003) speak of kinesthetic empathy when referring to the embodied empathic process that takes place within the spectator. They refer to the inner-felt physical sensations that are evoked in the spectator while watching/experiencing the dance performance.

This paper takes *The Cost of Living* as its departure in order to investigate the kinesthetic experiences that are evoked by screendance. Although cinema works differently to live performance events, kinesthetic empathic processes are still at work here. D'Aloia (2012)

states that in film the spectator interacts with a series of quasi-bodies. "The film images are celluloid bodies that, nonetheless, express vitality thanks to their movements and their resemblance to human bodies and movements" (p. 95). Kinesthetic empathy is awakened in the spectator "by the film's mediation (in the double sense of keeping separate and putting in contact) between the two lived-bodies, although that of the character is only a quasi-body" (D'Aloia, 2012, p. 980).

In dance films the experience of both our own body and the on-screen body is thus not only visual-perceptual but also empathic and kinesthetic. Kinesthetic empathy is triggered by the expressive properties of film: through the visual, the auditory and through physical and technical camera movements. Furthermore, as Wood (2016) says:

"The connection between the spectators and performers is affected by embodied imagination and the haptic visuality of the image. The viewers connect to the images on screen through their corporeal knowledge and kinesthetic sensibility to surfaces and gravity." (p. 250)

Three different elements can be distinguished in dance films that evoke empathic, kinesthetic reactions in the spectator: (1) narratives, (2) filmic techniques, and (3) synchronicity in movements (D'Aloia, 2012; Wood, 2016). Firstly, narrative structures are used in screendance to engage the spectator in an embodied way. Through narratives, the spectator relates personal bodily experiences to the bodily movements that are being seen on screen. Secondly, filmic techniques create a visual atmosphere that brings the spectator to a heightened kinesthetic state. Lastly, kinesthetic experiences are evoked by the synchronicity of the dancer's movements. "The spectators participate in the uplifting feeling of the movements and respond in an immediate emotional manner" (Wood, 2016, p. 251). These three elements will be used later in order to analyze several scenes in *The Cost of Living*.

The way in which the spectator relates to disabled dancers on screen is still a point of discussion. One might say that people with disabilities are already being staged in daily life (because of the normalizing, external gaze of the social other). I will argue in this paper that screendance offers possibilities for the opening up of new registers of meaning-making that force the spectator to look and engage differently with disabled people. The disabled body in dance films manifests itself through perceptual experience—not as an object among objects but as a bodily subject (Thompson, 2005), not as a Körper experience but as a Leib experience.

3.1. An Example: The Cost of Living by DV8

I will illustrate the difference between a Körper experience and a Leib experience within dance by analyzing three scenes from the dance film *The Cost of Living*. This

dance film was made in 2004 by DV8 Films Ltd. Although it was produced some time ago, the film still has not lost its relevance. The film was directed by Lloyd Newson, the founder of DV8 Physical Theatre, and combines dance, physical theatre, and dialogue. The movie is located in Cromer, a seaside resort town, at the end of the summer season. *The Cost of Living* is a dance film in which David Toole, a double-amputee dancer, plays the lead.

“David Toole, a disabled British dance artist, performs in *The Cost of Living* (2004), conceived and directed by Lloyd Newson, based on his earlier stage production. The film runs for thirty-five minutes and tells a story of two men who are street performers in an end-of-season English seaside resort. The locations are various and shift between urban, rural, domestic, and public sites. The narrative develops around the men’s relationship, their encounters with others, their attempts to attract women, their vulnerabilities and insecurities, as well as their tactics for survival.” (Whatley, 2010, p. 45)

The director Lloyd Newson states that the dance film is about those people who don’t fulfill our societal criteria of success. He asks himself what happens to those people who don’t fit in to the categories of success and perfection. Although Toole is the only dancer with an overt physical disability in this film, he is primarily a dancer among dancers. All the characters in the film have their own individuality, their own way of being, and their own autonomy, which make them all slightly different to what is perceived to be the ‘normal’ or ‘the average’. According to Whatley (2010), the film is so powerful because “it is located in bodies and bodily sensation that might be characterized as excessive” (p. 45). The film also blurs the boundary between fiction and reality (another example of binary thinking). Eddie and David are the real names of the main actors. Throughout the film it remains unclear whether the dancers play a character or are ‘just’ being themselves. The film lasts 35 minutes and is so rich in detail and narrative that just giving an overview would not be sufficient. I would therefore like to focus specifically on three different scenes, which I will henceforth refer to as the ballet scene, the film scene and the choreographic scene.

3.2. *The Ballet Scene*

The scene occurs halfway through the film. We have seen David and his friend Eddy at the seaside, in their apartment, in a bar, on the street, and together on an au-toped, as well as having fun by racing with the wheelchair through the streets and accidentally bumping into people.

The ballet scene starts with a close-up of the feet of ballet dancers who are doing exercises at the barre. We hear piano music in the background and the ballet teacher counting ‘two-three-four and-one’. The feet move in complete unison. They start with a battement

tendu, pushed sideways on the ground, with the right leg, followed by a battement glissé with a petit battement, then move to the left leg using a grand plié. Finally, the feet turn to the other side to continue the exercise. The dancers all wear classical outfits: pink tights, ballet shoes, and a black leotard.

In the next shot we see David Toole outside, on a summer’s day, with casual black trousers (cut below the upper part of his legs) and a black shirt, looking in at the windows. They are a little too high so David has to lean with his arms and lift himself up from the wheelchair in order to see what’s happening inside. Eddie joins him at the window. David then decides he wants to go in to join the dancers in the studio.

He moves out of his wheelchair and walks on his hands into the studio. The dance class is still going on: some dancers are doing exercises at the barre, others are stretching their bodies and chatting to each other. David moves inside and we see him moving through a mass of pointing legs. The music changes: the violin indicates a change in atmosphere. A different body has entered the space.

Suddenly the dance studio is empty except for David and a female ballet dancer. A dance duet unfolds between David and the classical dancer. It is a modern dance duet in which David and the female dancer move under and over each other in a playful, fluent and soft manner. In the corner we see another female dancer, a silent witness, who is now doing modern exercises. She is looking outside and so completely ignoring the dancing couple. David and the classical dancer move through the studio using the ground, they move in and over each other, stretching, lending and giving weight, and supporting the other. The camera moves to the right and we see another (fourth) dancer stretching his legs.

The female dancer suddenly interrupts the dance duet and walks over to her stretching colleague, leaning informally against the wall while they start chatting with each other. We then see Eddie, who is still an observer from the outside, pointing to David and inviting him to come outside. David leaves the studio. We hear a door opening: a sound that marks the end of this scene.

The scene is very rich in symbols and they will not all be identified here. An important element is the notion of moving inside at the beginning of the scene (entering the studio space) and moving outside at the end of the scene (entering the real world again). This can be interpreted as a movement that indicates a shift between the body as it is perceived from the outside (Körper) to the sensed, internal body (Leib).

When David and Eddie look in at the window (they are literally observers from the outside) at the ballet dancers inside, we see only Körper: idealized bodies that move in unison, with a culturally defined aesthetic. Perfect bodies, perfect shapes that move in a perfect way. Bodies are treated as objects here.

However, when David enters the dance studio (when he literally moves inside) and the violin emphasizes the

moment, we suddenly move to an embodied first-person perspective. The change from a classical dance vocabulary to a modern dance vocabulary can be seen as a disruptive symbolic element, as can the abandonment of unison movements; both mark the end of the Körper experience. Bodies are no longer treated as objects but as dynamic entities, always in a process of becoming, open to difference, moving into fields of affectivities. At this moment, as spectators, we are no longer involved in a Körper experience, but we are engaged in an embodied, sensed sense (a Leib experience). The fact that the other dancers in the studio—the silent witnesses—ignore the dance may contribute to this shift. Since the stretching dancers in the studio are not looking, we as spectators are invited to look. However, the way we look at this scene is changed by the (ignoring) attitude of the silent witnesses: apparently the scene is not that important, perhaps it is too ordinary (Whatley, 2010). As a result, the spectator's dominant gaze is interrupted and instead the spectator is invited to use different ways of looking (namely seeing, feeling and sensing). The ignoring attitude gives room to the spectator to come closer, to enter the private, to become intimate.

Filmic techniques such as changing the camera's viewpoint (first filming from the outside to the inside, then only inside and finally filming from the inside to the outside) mark the shift from Körper to Leib and back to Körper again. In addition, filming close to the floor provokes a feeling of gravity and weight in the spectator: this feeling of groundedness stimulates kinesthetic sensitivities in the spectator. Furthermore, the looking away (the ignoring attitude) of the silent witnesses in the dance studio serves as a gateway for the personal and the intimate. Finally, the shift from ballet to modern dance vocabulary can be seen as a movement away from normative, standardized aesthetics towards an aesthetic of differences.

3.3. *The Film Scene*

In another scene we see David in front of a building on a green field, sitting on the grass, without a wheelchair. He is alone. He has his sunglasses on. We hear the sounds of seagulls flying over. The pleasant, joyful music 'Do you believe in life after love' by Cher is replaced by sinister sounds. The last phrase of the song—'cos I know that I am strong'—resonates in our heads. The cameraman walks into the scene and approaches David in an aggressive and direct way. The deep, sharp shadows of the cameraman fall over David. The cameraman moves in circles around David. The cameraman is too close. He invades David's space, subordinates him. His gaze turns him into an object, a thing to be whipped at. The cameraman stands while David sits on the grass: the scene is shot from above, so that the cameraman looks big while David himself looks small.

The cameraman now enters David's personal space. He touches him but it is not a nice, gentle touch. The cameraman begins to ask David intrusive questions. David

in return reacts through movements that are simultaneously vulnerable, avoidant, and compliant.

"Can I ask you a question? What happened to your legs? Were you born like that? Or did you have them chopped off? Do you have an ass-hole? Or do you shit through your back? How do you go to the toilet? Can you masturbate? Seriously, I want to know. What's this lump on your back? Do you blame God for being born? What are these (touching his stumps)? Are they stumps? Do you have any friends? Have you ever been in a fight? Have you? If you hit me first, it's okay if I hit you back, isn't it? 'Cos you're a man. Do you trust me? 'Cos I don't trust you."

Then the cameraman walks out of the scene. David lies down on the grass.

The gaze of the cameraman places David under observation and causes him to experience himself as an object that is seen by others. In Lacanian terms (Lacan, 1964), David knows that he is being looked at and the gaze here alienates David from himself. The cameraman symbolizes the all-seeing eye that captures him and turns him into an object. The gaze denies his full subjectivity: David is reduced to an object and in this act he becomes alienated from himself. Little details all contribute to this process of alienation: David's sunglasses; the circular movement (the cameraman approaching David, David turning away); the harsh lighting with deep shadows; the whole scene shot from above (making David look small); and David's silence (not answering back). Here we, as spectators, experience the way in which David is reduced to a Körper.

Filmic techniques and narratives (the interrogation) are used in this scene to produce defamiliarization and alienation in the spectator. As spectators we feel uncomfortable and ashamed and not only because the cameraman invades David's space in a harsh and intrusive way, thereby completely denying his lived subjectivity. There is more involved here. Through the harsh interrogation, a narrative is constructed in which we, as spectators, have to position ourselves politically and move away from the normalizing, imposing gaze and towards a gaze that leaves room for the personal and the subjective. As spectators we not only feel shame, embarrassment and discomfort but also feelings of responsibility and guilt are produced. The cameraman serves as a symbol for our society: he is a symbol of the external, normalizing gaze that turns the disabled person into an object and denies him full subjectivity (that is, humanness). In this scene we, as spectators, are forced into feeling responsible for the societal, normalizing gaze that is (this must not be forgotten) created and mediated by all of us.

3.4. *The Choreographic Scene*

David is alone again. He sits on the grass and takes off his sunglasses. Music starts, an accordion makes a rec-

ognizable and human sound. David lifts himself up and does his now 'typical walk': moving on his hands, while his back and stumps swing from side to side. This scene is shot on a small hill. Casually dressed dancers suddenly and unexpectedly appear from under the hill, joining him in this dance, in his typical movements. The female and male dancers all move from one arm to the other, dragging their seemingly lifeless legs behind them. This is a powerful scene since 'difference in itself' has been taken here as a way to connect bodies. Here we encounter 'otherness' as a powerful force, as an aesthetic of difference, as Leibs that move together, as Leibs that celebrate the lived experience. We encounter here a collective of difference, all moving in unison, a sameness that nevertheless has its origin in difference.

The dancers collectively make variations on David's movements: they roll on the ground, spreading their legs, hopping from one side to the other, then turning again, standing on their feet, swinging their left leg, moving to the ground again, lifting the other leg over the body, sitting with their legs in front of them while walking with their arms, getting up again etc. It is as if they are finishing David's movements and in our imagination we can see the endless possibilities, the potentialities, of David's typical walk.

Finally, the dancers move backwards. David by now has disappeared from the scene. The dancers have returned to David's typical walk: walking on their hands, dragging their seemingly lifeless legs behind them. One by one they disappear under the hill, where they are no longer visible to us, the spectators. David returns and he is the last one to leave the scene.

We see the cameraman walking away with the camera in his hand. He is no longer filming. He looks back and we hear the accordion music at the same time. This scene clearly symbolizes the defeat of the all-seeing eye: subjectivity is restored and the lived experience has been foregrounded. A disabled embodiment and sensibility is validated (Overboe, 1999). We, as spectators, are invited to rethink disability by leaving representation and categorical thinking aside, and by recognizing the lived experience of disabled persons.

In this scene the synchronicity of movements invites the spectators to tune in to David's private experience of being his body. The synchronicity evokes a feeling of pleasure that subsequently allows the spectator to be "bodily carried away by an escapist flow of movements, while for another it is to feel viscerally involved in an awareness of effort, muscle and sinew" (Reason & Reynolds, 2010, p. 72). The feeling of pleasure raises awareness in the spectator that different self/other relations between spectator and disabled persons are possible and desirable. Furthermore, by multiplying David's personal movements, an aesthetic of distance as well as an aesthetic of intimacy is created. This double movement of distance and intimacy gives access to pre-reflective experiences, such as physical sensations, affects, and embodied intensities. The synchronicity of movements introduces an aesthetic of differences.

4. Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I asked myself the following question: How can we rethink disability within the field of screendance by using the phenomenological notions of Leib and Körper? *The Cost of Living* is an example of how an aesthetic of differences can be communicated in dance: the film deliberately questions the dominant aesthetic of dance by shifting attention away from perfect, fictitious, idealized bodies to bodies that are real, 'excessive' and different in themselves.

However, some criticisms should be noted. Firstly, the film (subconsciously) seems to assume an abled spectator. The fact that David is the only disabled dancer among abled dancers makes his position 'special' and possibly evokes feelings of pity in the spectator, as well as an acknowledgement of heroism. In both cases, the reality of Toole's disability is denied: the body is again reduced to a thing.

Secondly, the danger of analyzing *The Cost of Living* in terms of Körper and Leib could easily produce another binary way of thinking. This is not desirable. Slatman (2009) states that Körper and Leib are two interrelated concepts. The body as it is lived and sensed is not closed up in itself but is embedded in the outside world. Images of how the disabled body is looked at (from a societal perspective) thus merge with inner body images. Together they constitute bodily subjectivity. Although for the sake of argument I made a sharp distinction between Körper and Leib, these two concepts are closely interrelated. Its relationship, its difference in itself, constitutes bodily experience. The place where Körper and Leib meet is where an aesthetic of difference can arise.

Thirdly, *The Cost of Living* blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality. However, the film depicts David Toole as more real (hyperreal) than the other dancers. Toole performs his "own narrative, his own authentic biography" (Whatley, 2010, p. 45) while the others play more fictional characters. Although the authentic touch allows the spectator to come close and enter the private and the intimate, it also puts Toole in an unequal position.

Despite its limitations, *The Cost of Living* sheds some preliminary light on how we can shift our attention from a disabled body that is captured in a Körper experience to the opening up of new, radical spaces that invite us to look at each other in terms of subjectivity, the inner-felt, and the reality of our lived bodies. *The Cost of Living* questions the normative aesthetic standard of perfect bodies in dance and invites the spectator to rethink what is perfect and what is not. The film offers us an alternative by introducing an aesthetic of differences.

What I hope to have shown in this paper is that dance can help gain access to the Leib experiences of persons with a disability. A film such as *The Cost of Living* can encourage the acceptance of an aesthetic of differences that gives room to the personal, the sensed, and the lived experiences of disabled people:

“Rather than an ‘equality of rights’ based on identity politics, I call for an ‘equality of condition’ that validates both a disabled embodiment and sensibility. Our physical, mental and emotional manifestations of disability as well as the social, political, moral and physical environment will continue to have an impact upon us. But shifting the notion of an identity which is devalued to a lived experience that is validated causes a change in approach.” (Overboe, 1999, p. 23)

Dance can be helpful here. Firstly, because dance is the place where we share and express meanings with each other on a bodily level. Secondly, and more importantly, because dance provides opportunities to establish an ‘aesthetic of difference’, an aesthetic that communicates embodied selves that live and breathe. Bruce Curtis (1988, p. 18) states that we are all “dancing bodies”: we are all bodies that try to let out movements that are joyful, bodies that are vulnerable in themselves, bodies that want to communicate and be intimate with each other on the most basic level, namely by moving with each other. In my opinion, that is what lived experience is all about: the capacity to be moved by movement and be moved to move (Fuchs & Koch, 2014). Dance is within us and between us.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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About the Author



Carolien Hermans holds a master degree in dance and choreography. Next to this, she graduated (cum laude) at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, department Orthopedagogy. Currently she is a senior lecturer at the Conservatory of Amsterdam (Music in Education department). She is also a senior lecturer at the school of Arts and Economics and researcher at the Professorship in Creative Economy, HKU University of the Arts Utrecht. She is affiliated to the Institute for Cultural Inquiry, University of Utrecht, where she is doing a PhD on the effects of dance on the participatory sense-making of children with a disability.