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Philosophy of dance and disability

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Abstract

The emerging field of the philosophy of dance, as suggested by Aili Bresnahan, increasingly recognizes the problem that (especially pre-modern) dance has historically focused on bodily perfection, which privileges abled bodies as those that can best make and perform dance as art.[1] One might expect that the philosophy of dance, given the critical and analytical powers of philosophy, might be helpful in illuminating and suggesting ameliorations for this tendency in dance. But this is particularly a difficult task since the analytic philosophy of dance is too young to have achieved a comprehensive treatment of dance per se, let alone to update such a treatment in line with the demands of social justice. As a step in that direction, the present article (a) summarizes dance theorists on disabled dance (as opposed to the dance of the temporarily able-bodied, or TAB) and then applies (b) the philosophy of art and dance to disability, (c) the philosophy of disability to dance, (d) interdisciplinary disability theory to dance, and (e) my own Figuration philosophy of dance to disability, as inspired in part by John Dewey.[2]

1 | DANCE THEORY ON DISABLED DANCE

By "disabled dance" here, I mean any dance involving disabled bodies, as performers and/or choreographers, including both physical and psychological disabilities, and regardless of whether or not disability is visible or thematized. It thus excludes dances involving exclusively TAB dancers, whether attempting to imitate or represent disability, or even thematize TAB status. The only extensive application of philosophy to disabled dance is found in the work of Petra Kuppers, a German-born community performance artist.[3] Kuppers is currently the Artistic Director of The Olimpias: Performance Research Projects, and Professor of English, Women's Studies, Theater, and Art and Design at the University of Michigan.[4] In *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge*, Kuppers presents disabled

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dance as focused not on disabled people themselves—which she argues tends to essentialize disability and disabled bodies—but, rather, on the encompassing culture.[5] Put in terms of Frege's sense/reference distinction, Kuppers prefers to undermine the "sense" of the word "disability" in our society (rather than the assumed "references" of that word, including the bodies of Deaf persons and people in wheelchairs). In Kuppers' words, *Bodies on Edge* "is about an undoing of certainties, a questioning of categories, about unknowability and difference," and "seeks to acknowledge and subvert the structural position of 'disability' as a marker" (4). In short, Kuppers seeks to deconstruct disability itself.

Most problematic, for Kuppers, are dance works that turn the body of disabled dancers into a spectacle. One example of this is a British film entitled *Outside In* (1995), which Kuppers terms a "filmdance" (60, 64). The literal dance within this filmdance's cinematic manipulations (including montage and closeups) features a disabled dancer named David Toole, who has no legs and who engages in what Kuppers calls "strategies of 'enfreakment' " (meaning to invite the audience to view oneself as a freak show performer) (66). At one point in the videoed performance, Kuppers relates, Toole leaves his wheelchair and performs virtuosic acrobatics, which she considers problematic in part because feats caused injuries that forced Toole to take a hiatus from dance (66). Nevertheless, Kuppers concludes that "his performances of disability … had a wide effect inside and outside the disabled community in the UK" (66). As for the filmdance of *Outside In* as a whole, Kuppers judges it "progressive," insofar as "it shows the disabled performer as a motivator, manipulator, and mover outside her and his 'cultural baggage' as disabled, passive victim, but not outside his or her own body" (68).

Kuppers offers another cautionary tale of dance and disability through her analysis of *Le Labyrinthe*, a dance work by the French group *Compagnie de L'Oiseau Mouche* (The Hummingbird Company).[6] Depicting a struggle between the original labyrinth's minotaur and his keepers, *Le Labyrinthe* features 20 performers with developmental disabilities, at the center of which is a man in a bull mask, held with ropes by a circle of people, who concludes the dance by removing his mask, laughing, and dancing slowly and gracefully with the other performers in a flamenco (73). Kuppers interprets *Le Labyrinthe* in the context of Antonin Artaud's concept of the "theater of cruelty" (which she later cites as a major influence on her own choreography). Her concern is that explicitly associating disabled bodies with irrationality and animality runs the risk of exacerbating negative stereotypes (without achieving "the Artaudian magic") (76). Thus, as with Toole's attempt in his dance in *Outside/In* to channel the "freak" trope into disabled justice, *La Labyrinthe*'s attempt to similarly channel the "animal" trope strikes Kuppers as too risky.

Kuppers justifies her preferred alternative, "video dance," by critiquing a short film called *The Fall* (directed by Darshan Singh Bhuller) in which a woman falls from a wheelchair, accompanied by video clips of a younger woman dancing (88). Kuppers argues that the distance that *The Fall* creates through its filmic technologies helpfully undermines the audience's unconscious certainties regarding disabled bodies, narratives, and identities. For example, it leaves unanswered a variety of questions regarding the actor in the wheelchair, Celeste Dandeker (92). Is Dandeker's character the same as the younger woman shown in the video clips? Is Dandeker herself disabled? Is the film's narrative Dandeker's life story? For Kuppers, such questions productively undermine problematic assumptions about disability and thereby facilitate disabled social justice. One might be sympathetic to Kuppers' conclusion, yet troubled by the possible implication that disabled dancers cannot or should not engage in live dance performance unmediated by film dance; if promoting live disabled dance requires significant changes in dance performers, audiences, or environments, then so be it.

One such change is advocated by Ann Cooper Albright, a performer, choreographer, and currently Professor and Chair of Dance at Oberlin College. In her essay, "Strategic Abilities: Negotiating the Disabled Body in Dance," Albright describes a dance she choreographed on disability, in part in response to her spinal degeneration and periods of partial paralysis (56).[7] Unlike the philosopher Elizabeth Barnes and literary theorist Tobin Siebers (discussed below), Albright makes a distinction between "visibly disabled" and "visibly nondisabled dancers," in order, she explains, to make room for "less visible disabilities" such as those involving eating disorders and sexual abuse (58). To clarify, the visible/invisible distinction does not necessarily correspond to the physical/mental distinction (the latter of which Barnes does make). One interesting implication here is that a dance can be disabled—and arguably, given Albright's

point, most professional dance is—without being recognized as such. Put in the rhetoric of the allied LGBT+ movement, not all disabled dancers have "come out" of the disability "closet," whether to their audiences, their colleagues, or perhaps even themselves.

The most important distinction Albright invokes, though, is Mikhail Bakhtin's between the "classical" versus "grotesque" body, which she elaborates by quoting literary theorist Mary Russo's essay, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory."[8] In short, Russo defines the grotesque body as the messy, aging, imperfect body of fluid secretions, while the classical body is the one depicted in Greek statuary and the performance of a prima ballerina (58). Albright's vision for disabled dance is realized in her preferred dance form, namely, the improvisatory, vulnerability-celebrating Contact Improvisation, which she claims deconstructs the distinction between grotesque and classical bodies, and thus leads to radically new ways of perceiving embodied dance performances, including for temporarily disabled dancers such as herself (59).

From this perspective, Albright criticizes the work of a professional dance troupe called the *Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels*, whose members consist of both traditional dancers and disabled dancers in wheelchairs. More specifically, Albright objects to the notion, found in the Cleveland company's press literature, of a spirit of dance (as opposed to its body) that overcomes the disabled body's limitations (60). The problem, Albright claims, is that this very language presupposes and perpetuates the ableist idea that one has to supersede one's disability in order to be a legitimate dancer (60). And the basis of the latter goal, on Albright's analysis, is a pathological desire, pervasive in U.S. American society, for control (62). In the case of disabled dance, the object of attempted control is the grotesque dancing body, as manifested in "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 fleshly experience—heavy breathing, sweat, technical mistakes, physical injury, even evidence of a dancer's age or mortality" (62). In short, audiences expect dancers to create the illusion of perfectly classical bodies, which visibly disabled dancers cannot.

Note, in the prior quote, that Albright invokes grace, which she claims is a bodily illusion that belongs to Bakhtin's oppressive "classical body." In short, she presents grace as the illusion of physical "perfection." One could argue, however, that this is an unnecessarily narrow conception (albeit one which the *Cleveland Wheels* appear to share). Thus, when Albright criticizes their work for "an ethos that reinstates classical conceptions of grace, speed, agility, and control within the disabled body," she closes off the possibility of other kinds of grace (62). As I will argue in detail below, in at least one alternate conception, that of John Dewey, grace is neither a mere illusion, nor exclusively bodily (rather than mental), nor exclusively bound to the classical body.

2 | PHILOSOPHY OF ART APPLIED TO DISABLED DANCE

As I explore elsewhere, Nelson Goodman's primary interest in dance, given his overarching interest in the linguistic dimensions of art, is with the formal language of dance notation.[9] Although Goodman's philosophy of dance is not on its own directly relevant to dance and disability, Joseph Margolis' critique of that philosophy does have implications for dance and disability, so I will now summarize just enough of Goodman to frame Margolis' critique and then spell out those implications.

Goodman attempts to classify all major art forms as either "allographic" art (which involves interpretations of an objective, repeatable score, and thus cannot be forged) or "autographic" art (which involves a subjective, non-repeatable creative process, and thus can be forged); dance constitutes the second major allographic art (along with music). To legitimize this system, Goodman thus needs dance to be allographic, because without dance, music would be the only major allographic art, which might suggest that the allographic/autographic distinction is ultimately a futile attempt to force music's uniqueness onto the arts in general. But Goodman himself admits that dance possesses several significant autographic features and that even the best dance notation system (Labanotation) fails Goodman's own standards for adequate notation, with amenability to notation being the basis for an artform's being allographic. Thus, perhaps there is actually no such natural genus called "art," and music is merely the one of the so-called arts

that differs the most from the others. In sum, though dance's inclusion may appear salvific of Goodman's system from a distance, I argue that, on closer inspection, dance's autographic features undermine attempts to reduce it to music's purer allography.

Margolis comes to a similar conclusion, in his essay entitled "The Autographic Nature of the Dance."[10] After criticizing the "conceptual poverty" of most philosophy of dance and claiming that dance notation such as Labanotation is "radically less interesting" than the equivalent notation in music (i.e., musical scores), Margolis then challenges Sirridge and Armelagos' endorsement of Goodman, and of the latter's anti-expressionism in dance (419, 420). Margolis' challenge centers on his distinction between (a) dance's expressive formal vocabulary (which he terms "style1") and (b) a dancer's expressive idiosyncratic personal movements (which Margolis terms "style2") (423). The problem Margolis sees for Goodman is that dance notation is inherently incapable of capturing style2, even though style2 can drastically change the identity and nature of a dance performance (including as part of the history of a dance work's production). Thus, Margolis' titular conclusion: dance, like the visual arts, is autographic.

The main implication for disabled dance here is a greater agency for disabled choreographers and dancers (qua creators of autographic works) and an increased significance for their disabled bodies (qua part of the identity of the dance via history of production). In other words, Goodman's allography involves homogenization, standardization, and abstraction for the art in question, while disabled bodies and dancers are crucially heterogeneous and deviant to TAB norms, and the locus of their divergence depends on the concreteness of their specific embodiments. Thus, if those aspects of dance and dancers are denied artistic relevance, then disabled dancers and choreographers are left with fewer resources for articulating their works and having them recognized in their differences.

The first major attempt at a comprehensive analytic philosophy of dance is found in Graham McFee's *Understanding Dance* (2003) and its follow-up *Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance* (2011), although it too lacks direct relevance for dance and disability.[11] What is relevant, however, is the critique of McFee by Noël Carroll and William Seeley, which involves one important implication for disabled dance.[12] After summarizing that critique, I will elaborate on that implication.

Carroll and Seeley argue, contra McFee, that kinesthetic understanding is a legitimate and vital aspect of experience in general, and dance perception in particular. For Mcfee, they claim, "motor perception" does not exist; and even if it did, it would be immaterial to the contents of dance (180–181). McFee's reasoning, they explain, is that the object of the alleged motor perception—namely, the dancer's motor expressiveness—is involuntary and thus cannot express either the dancers' intentions or dance meanings. Carroll and Seeley's counterevidence to McFee's conclusion includes the "kinetic transfer" of involuntary foot-tapping while watching a dance performance, and a study finding that ballet dancers and Brazilian capoeira martial artists have similar cortical brain activity responses when viewing both ballet and capoeira (which was not true of a control group trained in neither discipline) (181). Furthermore, they claim, even though choreographers self-consciously intend to communicate using the sensorimotor cues (detected by the ballet dancers and martial artists), and even though those cues are indeed vital for audiences' interpretation of dances, this does not entail (much less require), that the choreographers understand the mechanisms whereby those cues are communicated. More generally, Carroll and Seeley criticize McFee for what they identify as his Wittgenstein-based assumption that the philosophy of art is only concerned with aesthetic appreciation and judgment (183). Against this view, the coauthors affirm a broader, Aristotelian view of the philosophy of art that includes ontological and psychological issues as well (183).

Returning to the important implication of Carroll's and Seeley's analysis, a TAB audience member's lack of kinesthetic understanding of disabled dancers' motor expression undermines that audience member's aesthetic experience of the performance. Put differently, if audiences' judgment is influenced by their involuntary kinesthetic responses, then since those responses depend, physiologically and psychologically, on a similar embodiment between TAB dancer and TAB audience, their judgments of disabled dances and dancers will be incomplete (since only a subset of the dance movements will have been registered kinesthetically). Moreover, even if Carroll and Seely are wrong, and McFee is correct that the value of a dance work is determined by audiences' appreciation and judgments of the work's content and the dancer's conscious intentions, the predominantly TAB audiences' ableist biases may lead to a devaluing of disabled works and dancers.

3 | PHILOSOPHY OF DISABILITY APPLIED TO DISABLED DANCE

At the intersection of the philosophy of dance and the philosophy of disability is Anita Silver's essay, "From the Crooked Timber of Humanity, Beautiful Things Can Be Made."[13] Silver poses the following question: Why we are able to find beauty in artistic representations of anomalous human bodies (such as figures in cubist paintings), and yet repulsed by real-life encounters with human bodies resembling those artworks (her primary example being the bodies of people with osteogenesis imperfecta, type III)? Silvers' question derives its force from Kant's aesthetics, which she utilizes in observing that both artistic and real-life anomalous bodies involve the formal intricacy, complexity, and deviation that facilitate the free play of the understanding and imagination in Kantian aesthetic judgment. With this frame in place, Silvers' answer to her question is that we are sufficiently familiar with the history of artistic media to interpret counterintuitive artworks as creative, original variations, whereas we are unfamiliar with human biological history, leading us to misinterpret real-life disabled bodies as mere deviance and deformity. Seeking to rectify this, Silver claims that "aestheticizing disability elevates otherness to originality, thereby defeating the hegemony imposed by 'normal' socio-political relations" (218). In other words, Silvers encourages us to consciously deploy, in everyday encounters with disabled bodies, perceptual strategies that we already unconsciously deploy in artistic perception, that is, to see disabled bodies as beautiful through seeing them as artistic variations on our shared evolutionary history. The implication for disabled dance would presumably be that one should view disabled dancers as already-aestheticized bodies that are further aestheticized by their position in dance performance.

Though it does not explicitly address the philosophy of dance, Elizabeth Barnes' (2016) monograph, *The Minority Body*, has important implications for disabled dance.[14] In her preface, Barnes notes that at the beginning of her academic interest in disability inquiry she was forced to look beyond analytic philosophy for constructive accounts thereof, finding the rare treatments of disability in that literature to be intensely negative (including Derek Parfit's "handicapped child" thought experiment and Peter Singer's argument in favor infanticide for disabled children) (ix-x). As for her own contribution, Barnes acknowledges that *The Minority Body* covers only physical disability, which undermines its applicability to disabled dance, since (as Albright observes) psychological disabilities (including anorexia, bulimia, and depression) are far more common than physical ones among dancers. Put simply, disability in dance is less about visibility and more about the experience of disabled bodies.

Barnes begins by rejecting both "naturalistic accounts" of disability and purely "social construction" theories (13, 21). She argues that the former view disability as objectively disadvantageous, independently of social context, and that the latter ignore the fact that the body is partially constitutive of disability, though not necessarily in a negative way. Splitting the difference, Barnes offers a "moderate social constructionism" founded on the disability rights movement. Her informal definition of disability is that it "*just is* whatever the disability rights movement is promoting justice for" (43). In other words, the disability rights movement created the very concept of disability, which means that it is "constructed from group solidarity" (44). More formally, one is disabled if one possesses a bodily trait that the disability rights movement has identified as a focus for its struggle. On this basis, Barnes argues that disabled bodily traits constitute "mere-differences" (instead of "bad-differences") from able-bodied traits. This distinction is crucial because it implies that disabled traits do not automatically make the life of a given disabled person worse (although she concedes that *some* traits do in fact make *some* disabled lives worse), as attested—crucially for Barnes—by disabled persons' own firsthand testimony (54). Based on such testimony, she concludes that disability is ultimately a value-neutral part of reality.

Although Barnes does not discuss aesthetics or the arts, one can safely infer several applications of her work to dance. For one thing, disabled dancers would have to be "merely different" (rather than "bad-different") from TAB dancers, and disabled dance works should probably be understood as value-neutral relative to able-bodied dance works (i.e., a disabled dance performance should not be assumed to be inferior to an able-bodied dance performance). So far, these implications align well with the current consensus among disability theorists (despite being rejected by most of the professional dance community, especially in ballet). More controversial, though, is a second implication of Barnes' work, namely, that disabled dance would be defined as any dance that includes a trait for which the disability rights movement

takes itself to be fighting. That is, whether a given dance counts as disabled might not be a matter of the free and conscious choice of individual choreographers and dancers—regardless of their own disability status. This is potentially problematic because it appears to entail that TAB choreographers could make dances that are disabled without realizing those are disabled dances, and disabled choreographers could create able-bodied dances without realizing that fact. In addition to being strongly counterintuitive, this could endow TAB choreographers and performers with significant power to cause harm, while simultaneously disempowering their disabled counterparts. For example, a TAB person could make a "disabled dance" that thematizes disability but reinforces oppressive stereotypes.

4 | TRANS-DISCIPLINARY WORK ON DISABLED DANCE

Leaving behind philosophy proper for the interdisciplinary field of disability studies, at the intersection of disability and the arts one encounters the work of Tobin Siebers. His 2010 monograph, *Disability Aesthetics*, begins with the following, Baumgarten-influenced definition of aesthetics: "the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies" (1).[15] What is controversial in this definition is that mainstream philosophers of art, at least since the 20th century, have tended to recoil from the aesthetics. The dimension of the aesthetics in which Siebers is most interested is illustrated in Warhol's car crash and disaster paintings, and in the work of Mary Duffy and Tyree Guyton, all of which restore the centrality of aesthetics by making their artworks all about the body (2). Guided by these exemplars, Siebers' thesis is that disabled bodies and minds constitute the core of modern art, in part by bringing non-traditional aesthetic values such as disgust, horror, and trauma to the fore. It is this fact, he argues, that explains why modern art's most vehement critics are also the most ableist, namely, the Nazis, who officially endorsed art characterized by kitsch (and especially depictions of homogeneous, healthy, and conventionally attractive human bodies). Against this fascistic ableism, Siebers' concept of disability aesthetics "prizes physical and mental difference as a significant value in itself," and in so doing, helps to enlarge the range of what audiences find beautiful and pleasurable (19). In this way, Siebers' conclusion dovetails with that of Anita Silver, with the significant difference that Silver advocates (more narrowly) a beautifying of disability-perception, while Siebers affirms a broad array of aesthetic values (including, but not limited to, beauty).

Siebers extends this analysis and applies it to dance's kindred genre of performance art, in "In/Visible: Disability on the Stage."[16] He begins by noting the paradox that, although the theater (as hinted by its etymology) is a space of seeing/appearance, it is impossible for able bodies to appear *as such* on the stage, due to their commonness/normality. Moreover, like Barnes (but unlike Albright), Siebers rejects the distinction between visible and invisible disabilities. On the one hand, he notes, many more disabled people pass as able-bodied than TAB folks realize (including blind and even some wheelchair-bound folks). And on the other hand, some disabilities that are usually invisible nevertheless occasionally manifest at critical moments. In this light, Siebers declares the following goal for disabled performance: "to make disability a resource for expanding the emotions represented onstage, using the specific feelings created by disabled bodies and minds to found a new and modern disability theater" (143). In other words, Siebers wants to enhance disabled bodies' agency and power, rather than treating them as merely passive objects or themes.

Siebers acknowledges two main objections to this goal. First, some critics claim that most disabled actors, because they cannot "pass" as able-bodied, cannot adequately perform the roles of able-bodied characters. Though he acknowledges this current reality, Siebers explains it as the result of long-standing traditions, in which audiences are led to interpret onstage disability as a metaphor for "evil, social chaos or moral uplift," which "sets into motion a secondary plot that risks taking over the narrative" of the artwork (144). Moreover, Siebers counters that no one objects to TAB actors being cast as superpowered superheroes (with "superpowered" naming the opposite pole from "disabled" on the abilities spectrum). The reason? Superhuman bodies are a pleasant distraction, Siebers argues, from the limitations, frailty, and mortality of which disabled folks remind the TAB.

As for the second objection, Siebers also concedes that "the disabled body summons emotional responses that disrupt the aesthetics of the performance" (144). Nevertheless, he echoes literary theorist Leo Bersani in asserting

that, when a disabled performer is cast as an able-bodied character, “the figure on the stage splits body and dramatic character to represent multiple and partial aspects of the self, producing an aesthetically pleasing, though perhaps slightly masochistic, discovery of our inaccurate identifications in the world” (149). That is, when a disabled actor is cast as an able-bodied character, TAB audiences both (a) easily and pleasurably relate to certain non-disabled aspects of the character (such as her/his virtues and hopes), while also (b) relating with difficult and discomfort to certain disabled aspects of the actor (such as her/his vulnerability and dependence).

Applied to disabled dance, this would seem to suggest (as Silver does above) that there is at least one automatic benefit to disabled dancers performing in traditionally able-bodied dances. The difference is that for Silver TAB audiences need to let their dissonant experiences expand their knowledge (about human evolution) and aesthetic taste (in broadening notions of beauty), whereas for Siebers there is already something aesthetically pleasurable in the dissonance itself. In both cases, the solution for disabled dance is for audiences to appreciate differently, not for disabled dances to be danced differently. To explore the latter alternative, I now turn to my own philosophy of dance.

5 | FIGURATION ON DISABLED GRACE

As noted above, the Figuration philosophy of dance draws on John Dewey (among others) to advocate an alternate, non-ableist conception of grace. More specifically, I interpret Dewey's concept of grace in *Art as Experience* as follows: an organism's moving so smoothly through its environment that the environment (and/or some “greater force” in said environment) appears to be moving through the organism instead. Condensed to a phrase, grace for Dewey is “figure-ground reversing,” the result of an organism-as-figure adapting so perfectly to its environment-as-ground that the latter seems to be moving through the former (instead of vice-versa). Buttressing the legitimacy of this conception is the OED's etymology for grace, which notes that it originates from the Ancient Greek word *kharis*. And this, in turn, implies the two most important aspects of the “Move” of grace in Figuration. The first aspect is that, at an etymological level, *kharis* is also the source of the English words “charisma” and “charm,” and means, etymologically, both pleasing quality and authoritative power. And the second aspect, at a conceptual level, is that *kharis* is the Greek root used in the title of the Karites (origin of “charity”), the ancient Greek goddesses of charm, beauty, nature, human creativity, and fertility—usually referred to as “the Graces.” The significance here for dance is that the Graces have been depicted as dancers across the history of Western art. This point also suggests that grace was originally understood as a divine gift (as in “the grace of God” in monotheistic traditions).

Returning to the Dewey-inspired definition, grace as a phenomenon is the result of a kind of gestalt switch. That which normally occupies the subject (or figure, or foreground) becomes the object (or ground, or background); and that which normally constitutes the background instead becomes the foreground. This is akin to the moment, during the viewing of an Impressionist painting, when one stops seeing the brushstrokes as the inert application of color to the canvas, and begins to see the carefully shaped mounds of acrylic paint as themselves the central aspect of the artwork. An organism is graceful, in this Deweyan sense, when it effaces its own particularity to such an extent that it becomes merely a presentation of a something else which both conditions the organism and transcends it. A graceful dancer, is thus like, for example, one of the dancers in Renoir's famous painting *Moulin de la Galette* (1876, Musée d'Orsay), a mere occasion for the virtuosity of both material and shaping intellect. Put differently, aesthetic gracefulness always takes place against a certain backdrop, a complex environment. And it is only through the organism's (or artist's, or artwork's) Deweyan “transactions” with this environment that expression becomes aesthetic. These transactions, or complex interactions, highlight the raw materials that have been artistically reworked (rather than merely discarded in their non-integrated singularity). Put more positively, grace always involves transgressing the integrity of the human, which includes the physical boundaries with the environment.

Applied to disabled dance, this analysis implies that, rather than abandoning grace altogether as irremediably ableist (as Albright implies), we should instead tap into grace's power, by redesigning our built environments (especially urban, cultural, and linguistic ones) so that those environments facilitate the graceful movement of disabled

persons, as well as TAB persons, through those environments. For example, the small ramps that increasingly complement U.S. street corners allow wheelchairs to glide smoothly from the asphalt to the concrete. The design they supplement, by contrast, forces many people into a less graceful series of movements as they attempt to negotiate the gap between street and sidewalk. In other words, in light of disability theory, the friction between a (literally or metaphorically) dancing organism and its environment could be reinterpreted, not as a failure or limitation in the dancer (as it is interpreted under ableist assumptions), nor a failure or limitation in the audience (as in Silver and Siebers), but rather in the environment. Put still differently, while ableist environments either force types of movements onto disabled dancing bodies inconsistent with those bodies' flourishing, those environments can be restructured (including with pluralistic affordances for disabled folks) such that a greater percentage of dancers' necessary and flourishing-enhancing movements can be graceful (in which process, moreover, our notions of what gracefulness looks like will also have to become more inclusive and plural). The prime benefit of the latter, finally, can be seen in a growing body of research (albeit limited to physical disability) on the positive impact of dance programs for disabled persons. One example can be found in Sara Houston's essay on dance therapy for people with Parkinson's, "Feeling Lovely."[17]

6 | CONCLUSION

I will now connect the prior section on Figuration and disabled dance more closely to other work in disability theory, specifically to several moments from the anthology, *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*.[18] First, with Rosemarie Garland Thomson's chapter, Figuration's grace affirms that the phenomenon of staring is only possible because our environments provide insufficient affordances (in ecologist J. J. Gibson's sense) for disabled persons, leaving such persons exposed against an unnaturally uniform and homogenous background of culturally enforced normality. Second, with Johnson Cheu, Figuration's grace affirms the extension of the body beyond the skin, which is common to both (a) Dewey's example of the baseball pitcher with ball and glove and (b) disabled performers with supporting technologies such as crutches and wheelchairs (143). Finally, following Sharon L. Snyder, Figuration's grace affirms that disability can represent the imminent breakthrough of the natural, chaotic, and dynamic through the walls of self-deluding artifice, order, and permanence in our ableist society (280). Telescoping these three strategies, we should make our environments more (a) heterogeneous, (b) replete with tools to extend the self beyond the skin, and (c) proximal to the profligate, deviant variety of the pre-human natural world. In this way, we can and should redeem grace from its admittedly ableist history, broadening its meanings and applications, and facilitating a greater array of graceful ways of being open to a greater plurality of dancing bodies.

ENDNOTES

[1] Bresnahan, Aili, "The Philosophy of Dance," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter Bresnahan, 2016, Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/dance/>. Though there are notable continental philosophers of dance absent from this initial version of Bresnahan's entry, she has communicated (in private correspondence) her enthusiasm to add those theorists to her the next scheduled revision. And regarding important counterexamples to this historical trend, dance companies noted for their focus on disability and mixed-ability dance include *AXIS* and *CanDoco*.

[2] See Joshua M. Hall, *Figuration: A Philosophy of Dance* (doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Hall, 2012 (3534442).

[3] The purpose of this acronym is to emphasize that being able-bodied is a temporary condition, which fails to obtain at least during infancy and advanced old age, and which (in between those life stages) always has the potential to be suspended due to various factors and circumstances.

[4] For more, see http://www-personal.umich.edu/~petra/.

[5] Kuppers, P. (Kuppers, 2003): "Disability and contemporary performance: Bodies on the edge". USA: Psychology Press.

[6] For more, see http://www.lasibylle.com/spectacle/le-labyrinthe/.

[7] Ann Cooper Albright, "Strategic abilities: Negotiating the disabled body in dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, Albright, 2001, pp. 56–66).

[8] Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," in FeministStudies/Critical Studies, Teresa de Lauretis, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, pp. 213–229).

[9] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976).

[10] Joseph Margolis, "The Autographic Nature of the Dance," *Journal of Esthetics and Art Criticism* 39(4):1981, pp. 419–427.

[11] Graham McFee, *Understanding Dance* (London: Routledge, 2003), and *Philosophical Esthetics of Dance* (London: Dance, 2011).

[12] Noël Carroll and William P. Seeley, "Kinesthetic Understanding in Dance," *Journal of Esthetics and Art Criticism* 71(2): 2013, 177–186.

[13] Anita Silver, "From the crooked timber of humanity, beautiful things can be made." *Beauty matters*, ed. Peg Zeglin Brand (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2000, pp. 197–223).

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