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Able As Anything:
Integrated Dance in New Zealand.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates integrated dance with a specific focus on New Zealand. The first chapter gives a review of the different models of disability. In chapter two I will discuss various theoretical perspectives on integrated dance and embodied experiences of integrated dance artists. A brief history of disability and dance in New Zealand is provided in chapter three, which offers an account of the progressive societal changes that created space for professional disabled dancers to enter the contemporary dance stage. This leads on to the fourth chapter which involves an analysis of three different works by New Zealand based Touch Compass, including This Word Love (1999), Lighthouse (2002) and Picnic (2003). The analysis demonstrates Touch Compass's development as a company, revealing an increasing complexity of the work, particularly with regard to how the disabled dancing body is represented and reconstructed on stage.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY
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INTRODUCTION

A memorable high school experience has helped me in thinking about the focus of my Masters thesis. As a senior high school student, I was part of a group of students involved in creating a performance for a dance competition. During the rehearsals a young student who was a wheelchair user entered the gymnasium, but apart from a quick glance no one acknowledged her presence and she left. Even after we eventually included her in the dance, we choreographed passive movements for her due to our limited expectations about what she was able do and gave her the character of “an evil queen”. In terms of the performance we turned her wheelchair into a throne and had approximately four nondisabled male students playing the role of the evil queen’s guards to carry her in. She then sat in her throne giving instructions through a series of arm movements for the guards to carry out her evil bidding. We assumed she could not dance because she “lacked” mobile legs and this did not fit our image of a dancer. The choreography we assigned to the young student reinforced associations between disability, passivity and dependence.

Moreover, the role of “evil queen” was typical of the many negative cultural representations of disability. The historian Paul Longmore describes how historically in film the emblem of evil has been physical disability.¹ Characters with physical disability who are evil, sinister or criminal reinforce three common prejudices: that disability is punishment for some wrongdoing; that people with disabilities are disillusioned by their fate; and that they are resentful of nondisabled people and if given the chance would harm them.² The senior high school students, including myself, did not consciously create the evil queen character in order to reinforce the prejudices described above but we may have been influenced by the stereotypical representations of disability in our culture.

When I was given the opportunity as a senior student to work with a young wheelchair user, there was no professional integrated dance company in New

¹ Longmore 1985, 32.
² Ibid.
Zealand. Therefore, there were no role models for any of us involved in the dance competition and little knowledge about how to include dancers with disabilities into our production. However, many years later after researching this new genre of western theatre dance I am able to reflect back on these early experiences. In my thesis I use the term "integrated dance" to refer to dance companies that consist of individuals with and without disabilities. I will explore integrated dance with a specific focus on New Zealand's first integrated company, Touch Compass Dance Trust. There has been little academic research into integrated dance performance specifically regarding the New Zealand dance scene, therefore it is important to begin to establish a body of material with this focus in mind.

Firstly, I will describe the different and changing views society has of disability, including the medical, social and universal models of disability as I need to refer to these models throughout my thesis. The second chapter investigates some current theoretical perspectives of dance and disability. I will describe perspectives on the "ideal" body in dance and ways in which in the disabled body may challenge or recreate this ideal. This leads on to some examples of how disability can be reconstructed on stage to avoid and disrupt negative constructions of disability. The way in which disability is read by audiences is not only affected through performance aspects, but also through the audience's own preconceived notions of disability and their knowledge of integrated dance. Therefore a range of viewing positions is discussed using the proposed viewing strategies by UK based dance scholar, Sarah Whatley. I have incorporated quotes from a range of integrated dance reviews to demonstrate the various viewing positions. In order to create a holistic perspective of integrated dance performance, the embodied experiences of integrated company members are also analysed, including dancers from Touch Compass. This provides some insight into the actual lived experiences of dancers with and without disabilities who work and perform together. The third chapter provides an overview of the socio-cultural and political history of disability in New Zealand and the development of integrated dance in the Pacific region. Finally, the fourth chapter focuses on Touch Compass with an analysis of three works spanning from 1998-2002. The analysis draws on the previous chapters to critically evaluate the various ways Touch Compass represents and constructs disability and the dancing body on stage.
Before I move on, I must address the terminology debate to explain why I have chosen to use the terms “disabled persons” and “persons with disabilities” interchangeably. Claudine Sherrill, a specialist in adapted physical activity, advocates for person first terminology, that is “person with disability”, for instance, “people who are deaf”\(^3\), stating that a major problem in calling persons “disabled” is that it groups people into a single category that emphasises an undesired difference.\(^4\) By contrast, Michael Oliver, author of *The Politics of Disablement* (1990) disagrees with person first terminology. He notes that many disabled people argue that disability is a crucial part of the self and they should be acknowledged for who they are, that is, disabled people.\(^5\) Philip Patston, New Zealand comedian and social entrepreneur proposes one 'label' for all people, Constructive Functional Diversity (CFD). He states that CFD removes the idea that an individual is different or deviates from a predetermined norm by creating a box in which all humans belong.\(^6\) However, he believes that for some time there will be a need to identify the distinction between people labelled disabled and non-disabled. He suggests that we use ‘people with unique function’ and ‘people with common function’ because “the word unique is a powerful reframe to our understanding of people who do not have common function...”.\(^7\) I have decided to use the term disability/disabled throughout my thesis because I want to acknowledge the current disability pride movement who appear to commonly use these terms. I will interchange between disabled people and people with disabilities because there does not seem to be a clear consensus on which is the most appropriate term.

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3 Sherrill 1998, 30.
4 Ibid, 32.
5 Oliver 1990, xiii.
6 Patston 2007, 1626.
7 Ibid, 1628.
CHAPTER ONE

Models of Disability

In researching the area of integrated dance it became apparent that it was necessary to have an understanding of the continually changing views that society has of disability and impairment and the position that people with disabilities hold within our society. Dance not only reflects society's conventional beliefs but also has the capacity to challenge these beliefs. On the one hand, discrimination against disability has been at times reinforced by dance. But on the other, dance has also been used as a vehicle for societal changes with a conscious effort by many dance practitioners. The reciprocal nature of dance and society means that I often need to refer to the varying models of disability throughout my thesis. This chapter gives a general overview of some of the predominant models, including the medical, social and universal models of disability.

1.1. Medical Model

The medicalisation of disability was prompted by the industrialisation and urbanisation of communities. People with disabilities were accommodated for within rural, cottage-based industries, however disability became increasingly seen as a problem with the growth of industrialisation and urbanisation. In addition, medical doctors developed during the First World War new and improved surgical, preventative and corrective skills and the ability to diagnose with greater precision. The changing industry structure and medical advances meant that people with disabilities became subject to the modern medical gaze and curative regimes, which promoted control, categorisation and segregation of people with disabilities. People with disabilities were viewed as being deficient and inferior to people without disabilities. To deal with the 'problem' of disability, many disabled people were cared for in hospitals, charitable institutions, lunatic asylums and old

8 Banes 1994, 44.
9 Hickey 2006, 36.
people's homes. This perception and treatment of people with disabilities established links between “disability and charity, disability and dependence, disability and disease, disability and decay.” These associations have been retrospectively encapsulated into the medical model of disability, in which disability is viewed as the result of some kind of deviation or deficiency from what is considered within the range of “normal human function”. For instance, Christopher Boorse, a science philosopher, writes:

Modes of internal functioning typical of our species, typical by natural selection, have given us abilities to adapt to a way of life in our environment that we value. The most serious failures in these internal functions would cause disability, pain and suffering undesirable enough to justify seeking medical care.¹³

This quote indicates that disability is assumed to be caused by failure of an 'internal function' and therefore an inability to adapt to the lived environment.

The medical model considers the cause of disability to reside in an impairment or condition that an individual may have. The focus is on the individual and how they can adapt themselves to fit into the physical and social environment as best as possible. Micheal Oliver argues that the medical approach does not consider wider aspects of disability, such as the context of time and place in which the individual lives.¹⁴ As a result, classifications of disability often portray disability as something static. This was apparent in the Living with Disability report (2004)¹⁵ where the surveys classified the severity of disability as severe, moderate or mild. These three categories are based on whether regular assistance is needed with everyday activities (preparing meals, shopping, dressing) and the need to use assistive devices, aids or equipment. There does not appear to be any consideration towards individuals whose functional abilities fluctuate on a day to day basis (such as individuals with MS or diabetic retinopathy) or to the different levels of accessibility (architectural, attitudinal) within the range of environments (home, work, local gym).

¹² Ibid, 16.
¹⁴ Oliver, 1990, 4-6.
¹⁵ Ministry of Health 2004 9, 54.
in which the individual lives. The lack of options for survey participants to indicate that their functional abilities fluctuate reinforces the assumed static nature of disability.

Moreover, consider the role of human-made environmental features that come into play with disability. Why are steps built instead of a ramp at the entrance of a building? Many people find steps difficult to negotiate such as those who use wheelchairs for mobility, people whose legs fatigue easily with steps or people who do not have the visual contrast sensitivity to distinguish between steps. The Living with Disability report (2004) categorised the causes of disability such as disease/illness, injury and birth, none of which incorporates physical or social causes exemplified in the situation described above. In fact the report stated that a person is defined as having a disability if they have any type of disability "resulting from a long-term health condition or health problem...". This demonstrates a continued commitment to a medical definition of disability even if social causes of disability are widely acknowledged.

1.2. Social Model

Individuals can be viewed as being disabled by the social and physical environment in which they live. This social view of disability has been continually developed for more than twenty years. As a result a range of theories has been proposed including materialist accounts, the cultural creation of disability, attitudinal accounts, the sociology of impairment, feminist accounts, psychoanalytic accounts and connections made between disablism and other forms of oppression. In general terms, however, the social model discourse draws a key distinction between impairment and disability where impairment is viewed as an 'individual limitation' and disability as a 'socially imposed restriction'. To alleviate disability, aspects of the social and physical environment must be changed so that the needs of the disabled individual are met. Take an individual with paralysis who uses a wheelchair for mobility for an example. The paralysis is impairment of the lower limbs (and possibly

16 Ibid, 42.
17 Ibid, 4.
19 Ibid, 459-466.
20 Oliver 1990, 9-11.
lower trunk) as a result of damage to its nerve supply, but the individual is disabled by a work environment designed for people who do not have paralysis and do not use a wheelchair for mobility. This is an environment where the buildings have steps and narrow doorways instead of ramps, elevators and wide doorways.

The social model provides the disability rights movement with a political agenda, that is the removal of barriers within a disabling society, and assists in changing the consciousness of disabled people. Individuals no longer feel at fault for their disabilities, liberated with the knowledge that it is society that must change.\(^\text{21}\) The social definition of disability allows for a political agenda under a framework of rights rather than an individual problem that ought to be solved through medical intervention.\(^\text{22}\) Therefore, since the social model's introduction there has been much action lead by people with disabilities, state changes in policy, and structural changes within organisations and service delivery for those who work with disabled people.\(^\text{23}\) Peter Beatson gives an early example of collective action, the 1980 'Winnipeg' walk-out. Disabled participants of the Rehabilitation International (RI)\(^\text{24}\) conference staged a walk-out in protest of the organisations 'ablism' hegemony and a year later formed Disabled Persons International (DPI).\(^\text{25}\) The DPI is an international network of national organisations or assemblies of disabled people that advocates for the human rights of disabled people.\(^\text{26}\)

There has been some criticism of the social model of disability. Sally French, a social science scholar, feels that the social model is an important way forward for disabled people, but acknowledges some of its limitations. She points out that individuals who identify themselves as being disabled are part of a diverse group of people and that the social model is problematic in its simplicity.\(^\text{27}\) She states that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to correct some of the profound problems experienced by disabled people through social manipulation and that eliminating disabilities of one population

\(^{23}\) Beatson 2000, 247-262; Tennant 1996, 26-29  
\(^{24}\) Rehabilitation International is a global network of people with disabilities, service providers, researchers, government agencies and advocates (http://www.riglobal.org/about/index.html), who according to Beatson at the time of the walk-out was dominated by nondisabled service providers. See Beatson 2000, 257.  
\(^{25}\) Beatson 2000, 257.  
\(^{27}\) French 1993, 17.
may disable the rest of the population. An example given by French is the idea of paying an individual with a disability an equal gross amount as their non-disabled work colleagues even if the individual is unable to work the same amount of hours. This would require massive societal attitudinal change. The possible resentment towards disabled people and the guilt experienced by disabled people might entail a transfer from financial disablement to perhaps attitudinal disablement.28

Those who advocate a social model of disability often describe the importance of disabled people forming a unified group,29 the argument being that increasing strength by numbers assists to facilitate social change. French describes the difficulties of forming a unified group within the disabled population. People with disabilities are often socially and culturally dissimilar, they are one of the most powerless groups in society and there are vast differences between sub-groups because of the diversity of their impairments. Some people with disabilities may distance themselves from a 'disability identity'. This may occur when a disabled individual has negative attitudes towards disability or towards other people who have a different impairment to their own.30 However, as will be shown in the chapter Disability and Integrated Dance in New Zealand, despite such difficulties the disabled community have used the social model of disability to successfully improve their position within society.

1.3. Universal Model

Similar arguments given by French (described above) have been brought forward by Jerome Bickenbach, who specialises in disability policy, and who promotes a universal model of disability.31 The universal model views disability as an "identifiable variation of human functioning."32 The medical and social models view disability as a point of difference from the non-disabled category. This results in disabled people being pitted against the rest of the population and being viewed as the 'other'.33 By contrast, universalism as defined by Irving Zola, views disability and impairment as

29 Finkelstein 1993, 14; Oliver 1990, 123-129.
31 Bickenbach et al. 1999, 1181.
32 Ibid, 1183.
33 Ibid, 1182.
fluid, continuous and context-based, hence a universal feature of the human condition. An individual's limitations and opportunities to participate in everyday activities continually changes. Participation is influenced by factors such as the diverse social and physical environments in which individuals live, as well as changes in the level of functioning an individual may experience on a day-to-day basis.

Universalising disablement, Zola claims, “demystifies the specialness of disability” as all people have needs which vary throughout their life spans. By expanding the range of what is considered human normality by including “empirically-grounded human variation”, universal principles can then be used to create accessible environments and tools that cater for this human variation. Zola gives an example of accessibility of automobiles, which should not involve 'special' design but regular add-ons that can assist all people to drive automobiles, particularly people with varying disabilities. This is still problematic; viewing disability as a natural part of human variation does not automatically make it easier to create accessible environments for all people. French gives an example of the complexity of eliminating environmental barriers. For instance different kinds of vision impairment requires different levels and kinds of illumination, such as lighting in a supermarket and the difficulty when it comes to individuals who require bright lighting to enhance their level of usable vision and individuals whose usable vision decreases with bright lighting. It is important to acknowledge that disablement is complex and finding solutions to eliminating societal and environmental barriers can be difficult and require much negotiation between various groups and sub-groups of individuals.

Bickenbach et al. advocate for universalism within disablement classification, but emphasise that in order to secure social change and promote self-empowerment, aligning oneself to a group of individuals in a similar situation can be an effective political strategy. This is a crucial point to make because currently society draws a

34 Zola, 1989 (reprinted online 2005), 4-6.
36 Ibid, 19.
37 Bickenbach et al. 1999, 1183.
38 Zola 1989 (reprinted online 2005), 12.
40 Bickenbach et al. 1999, 1185.
distinction between disabled and non-disabled individuals. There are groups of individuals who as a result, experience unequal distribution of resources and social and environmental barriers to full participation in life activities and tasks. Janet Price (scholar in feminism and disability studies) and Margrit Shildrick (scholar in critical disability studies) emphasise that by viewing various forms of embodiment as “a fluid, shifting set of conditions” rather than “stable identity categories”, it becomes more difficult to place individuals into oppositional binaries. They argue that in fact identities are inevitable and necessary, but this does not diminish their discursive power. Therefore it is not about giving up these categories entirely and consequently denying the existence of current realities, but acknowledging that individuals have agency to shift beyond normalised expectations within such categories.

42 Ibid, 238.
CHAPTER TWO

Dance and Disability

This chapter explores a range of issues concerning the genre of integrated dance. The first section gives theoretical perspectives of various aesthetic and choreographic forms that represent disability and the dancing body in different ways. The movement forms and tactics used in a performance as well as other influencing factors, such as the audience’s own beliefs and experiences, will effect how a performance is understood. The second section therefore highlights the various ways audiences may perceive integrated dance through the use of Sarah Whatley’s strategies of viewing. Finally, the third section provides an analysis of interviews of integrated dance performers from various secondary sources and film material. This is designed to provide some insight into the embodied experiences of dancers.

Historically, the development of western theatre dance has reflected a hierarchical social coding of the body. The choreography and performance space of theatre-in-the-round\(^\text{43}\) of 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) century social and court dances functioned to reinforce society’s class structure. The dances were performed by noblemen who aspired to an aesthetic ideal of grace, decorum and elegance.\(^\text{44}\) The move to the proscenium stage during the 17\(^{th}\) century increased competitiveness between the dancers to excel, which prompted comparisons between the dancer’s and judgement by viewers. Professional dancers originally performed comical or acrobatic dances in the court ballet and became more in demand as their skill level surpassed the abilities of the most technically proficient noblemen.\(^\text{45}\) Female professional dancers began performing in the court ballets of Louis XIV around the mid-17\(^{th}\) century.\(^\text{46}\) Both sexes were expected to uphold the image of the ideal form of elegance and harmony through uprightness, ease and effortless control in order to conceal physical

\(^{43}\) Theatre-in-the-round is also known as an arena theatre. This type of theatre is without a proscenium, where the stage is situated at the centre and is surrounded by seats.

\(^{44}\) Au 1988, 11; Foster 1986, 101.

\(^{45}\) Au 1988, 23.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
exertion. With the professionalism of dance through the establishment of dance institutions, such as Louis's XIV Academie de Danse Royale (1661), these idealised forms of embodiment became codified.

The following century saw a preference for the ballet lexicon within the concert dance tradition. Dance masters focused on a balance between beauty and physical virtuosity:

Higher elevations of leg lifts and leaps, longer balances and new varieties of turns were developed, facilitated by the introduction of the toe shoe for the female dancer and lighter, shorter costumes for both sexes.

The professionalism of ballet firmly established a sought after ideal body to produce the desired aesthetic, for instance long flexible limbs to create long straight lines. While we may believe that the ideal dancing body is an exclusive domain of ballet, Owen Smith argues that although theatre dance throughout the 20th Century challenged classical ballet aesthetics even contemporary dance promotes an exclusive, homogeneous body. The professional dance world is not unified since each genre or style fosters a particular aesthetic and promotes a specifically trained body to produce this aesthetic. Most of which, including contemporary dance, has historically not been inclusive of the disabled dancer, which will be discussed further in chapter three.

The appearance of disabled dancers within mainstream dance is an important stepping stone towards challenging the tradition's elitist history. Yet the choreography itself also needs to create new and inclusive aesthetics in order to further promote positive images of the disabled body. Otherwise the movements of the disabled dancer may simply recreate and reinforce ablest aesthetic ideologies. Ann Albright (scholar in feminism and dance) discusses how this may or may not be achieved within choreography and movement forms employed by various integrated dance

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48 Foster 1986, 144.
49 Smith 2005, 78.
50 Küppers 2000, 122.
51 Patston 2007, 1627.
companies. She does so by drawing on Bakhtin’s theories of the grotesque which posit that disabled dancers can force viewers to “confront the cultural opposite of the classical body – the grotesque”. The grotesque image is an oppositional image that holds power to destabilise the status quo. Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) states that the grotesque image of the body, which he considers as continually changing and never complete, is in opposition to the classic image of the body, which is complete, smooth, restricted and shown from the outside as entirely individual. “That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts or branches off is eliminated, hidden or moderated. All orifices are closed.” For instance, in western theatre dance, particularly in ballet, dancers should not perform with their mouths open to maintain a “classic” image of the body.

In today’s society, even outside the realm of dance, the construct of the perfect body or the classic body is one that is thin and toned, a controlled body: “control over ageing, bodily processes, weight, fertility, muscle tone, skin quality and movement”. In a recent article in the New Zealand wide Sunday Star Times (June, 2008), I discovered a contemporary example of the pressures to cover over what might be perceived as a grotesque body. University lecturer Alison Jones discusses public reactions to her decision not to cover her bald head after receiving chemotherapy, and not to have a breast reconstruction or a silicone-pad prosthesis after her mastectomy operation. Alison describes how people thought that wearing a wig “would make you feel normal” and the astonishment of the mastectomy bra-fitter when she requested a one-cup bra, who “had never heard of such a thing”.

All the prostheses are designed so that “no one would ever notice!”
Everyone can pretend you still have two breasts: in telling visual lies to each other, we can avoid literally facing the shocking loss that is not so uncommon.

Similar to the appearance of having no hair and one breast, many people with disabilities can be seen to have an ‘incomplete body’. The assumption is that when
people's bodies do not physically conform to the norm (however it is defined in society) that they should cover over the 'deviation' to give the illusion that their bodies do fit in with these ideal standards. Lennard Davis,\(^57\) scholar of disabilities studies, points out that by seeing only whole, systematised bodies, people can ignore their own repressed fear of the 'unwhole' or 'altered body'. Philip Patston, comedian and social entrepreneur, refers to this as dysfunctionphobia, which is the "internalised, often subconscious, fear or hatred of losing function, or becoming unable to function independently".\(^58\) He states that dysfunctionphobia is the result of knowing that impairment can occur unexpectedly and involuntarily, through a conditioned belief that 'impairment' is wrong and unnatural, and because of the historical exclusion, devaluation, poverty and discrimination of people with disabilities.\(^59\) Henceforth, the pressure on Jones was so strong that occasionally she suppressed her desire to oppose society's classic image of the body and wore a head scarf and a silicone pad prosthesis to avoid unwelcome attention.

The body in dance is supposed to be homogeneous, exhibit physical control and technical virtuosity, as we have seen above. A disabled dancer might be physically different to the image of the "ideal" dancer and therefore challenge views regarding who can dance. But unless the choreography too destabilises these classic aesthetics the disabled dancer may recreate the "ideal" bodily image within dance. Albright gives an example of how this can occur through discussion of the integrated company, Cleveland Dancing Wheels. Founded in 1980, Dancing Wheels is a modern dance company based in the US state of Ohio that integrates 'stand up' and 'sit down' (wheelchair) dancers.\(^60\) Albright states that this company creates work that re-establishes classical understandings of speed, grace, agility and control within the disabled body.\(^61\) She claims that the illusion of grace is reinforced in an early work of the Dancing Wheels, entitled Gypsy (1993), choreographed by Todd Goodman. In a duet between a wheelchair dancer and nondisabled dancer the illusion of grace was achieved by the nondisabled dancer pulling on fabric to send the wheelchair dancer gliding across the stage, this gives the movement a continuous floating quality.\(^62\)

\(^{57}\) Davis 1997, 57.
\(^{59}\) Patston 2007, 1627.
\(^{61}\) Albright 1998, 62.
\(^{62}\) Ibid, 59.
Albright states that to undermine the association of their body with the grotesque, many integrated dance groups emphasise classical elements of disabled bodies' movements, such as the graceful gliding of wheelchairs. However, they proliferate the 'classic beauty' ideals of dance. There are reasons for this strategy. Davis explains that while Bakhtin deemed the grotesque a form of class rebellion that promoted counter hegemonic aesthetic values, the term signifies undesirability. Davis notes that both the terms grotesque and disability are used in society to symbolise "otherness", "solitude", "tragedy" and "bitterness". Indeed, the fact that UK-based integrated company CandoCo has been labelled a freak show by dance critic Michael Scott underlines his point. Hence the fear of being labelled grotesque explains why some integrated companies place elements of the classical dancing body onto the disabled dancing body.

New Zealand choreographer and academic Suzanne Cowan has done the opposite in her performance-based research Grotteschi (2008). Cowan uses the exaggerated nature of the grotesque to maximise difference rather than try to minimalise it. Cowan has what she refers to as two "floppy legs", so she added four more floppy legs to her costume and became Ava the Amazing Spider Woman. The exacerbation of difference appears to be possible because, as Cowan states, people are no longer so shocked by dancers with disabilities:

I think we have gotten over the shock value of, oh my god, it's somebody with a disability dancing...so then that enables people to actually see what's happening, what kind of movement they're really offering.

The argument above states that integrated companies are now being appreciated for movement aesthetics that oppose classic aesthetics because audience members are more open to seeing diverse bodies on stage. This might be true for people who regularly attend dance performance. Newcomers to dance performance might still...
experience this initial shock particularly if they have only been exposed to mainstream media representations of dancers such as blockbuster dance movies.

The grotesque element of exaggeration is one strategy that can be used to challenge the image of the ideal dancer. Albright states that contact improvisation utilises other aspects of the grotesque, making it an effective movement form in challenging classic elements of virtuosity and control within dance. Contact improvisation is a form with which dancers interact with one another using weight and momentum of each other’s body. It focuses on the ongoing process of the flow between bodies rather than specific shapes and formal positions. Contact Improvisation is a movement style used extensively by integrated dance companies such as Touch Compass and CandoCo, as its principles promote diversity through valuing a range of dancing bodies and equality through the reciprocal interaction of two dancers. As choreographer and founder of Touch Compass, Catherine Chappell highlights:

Contact Improvisation started out as a form that had equality between men and women...meaning that a woman could support and guide a man up using natural weight and momentum and the same vice versa. That principle I think does feed back into mixed ability [integrated] dance and that is the aim, that there is a sense of equality, that we're not having one person more superior than the other...69

Chappell here discusses the fact that contact improvisation can provide a reciprocal relationship between two people with different and unique functions rather than singling out one person as superior. Albright argues that the emphasis on movement dialogue between dancers refocuses the viewer’s gaze so that an individual’s particular physicality, aesthetic, movement style or range is seen as an entity in itself rather than conforming to a set of technical and aesthetic ideals. The elements of contact improvisation, such as the flow between bodies, the release of bodies into the floor and the use of momentum are valued in the performance over having a particular bodily form, learning specific shapes and formal positions.

While Albright’s discussion focuses on how the disabled dancing body can embrace

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68 Albright 1997, 84.
69 Chappell 1998, in Catherine Chappell and Dancers.
70 Albright 1997, 76.
conceptions of the grotesque to counter exclusive ideals of the classic dancing body, Küppers explores how the cultural conception of the disability category can be recreated within dance. She investigates the various strategies employed by disabled dancers in order to demonstrate that boundaries surrounding categories of disability are fluid rather than impermeable. In a video blog, Lawrence Carter-Long, a dancer with the integrated company GIMP, describes some of the social expectations surrounding disability:

Disability in our culture is allowed to be inspirational, we’re allowed to be heroic, we’re sometimes allowed to be pathetic, what we’re not allowed to be is creative⁷¹.

Carter-Long describes GIMP’s choreography as a “collision” between two worlds that are not supposed to co-exist rather than providing a “safe pre-arranged marriage between dance and disability”⁷². For example, the choreography involves a non-disabled dancer who violently throws Carter-Long, who has cerebral palsy, around the stage, rather than reinforce images of fragility by displaying soft and caring interactions between the dancers. In this way the company steps outside expectations or boundaries of the disability category by not only displaying the fact that people with disabilities can dance and be creative but through shocking their audiences.

Küppers analyses dance and disability through three different public performances involving a shopping mall, city streets and the public space of television. For instance she discusses the tactic of creating work that has multiple and layered readings using a solo performed by the dancer Elisabeth Löffler in Einblick (1995) by the Austrian performance group Bilderwerfer. In this performance Löffler performs behind a shop window in a Viennese shopping mall. Löffler, who is dressed and made up as if she was about to go out to a night club, explores the space and pathways with her wheelchair and crutches. During the performance fragments of personal narratives are played through speakers that have no connection with the movements being performed.⁷³ According to Küppers there are many possible readings of the

⁷² Ibid.
⁷³ Küppers 2003, 60-61.
performance. For example, the costume disrupts images of passivity, the fragments of personal narratives heard demonstrate the multiple layers of a disabled person's life, and the disabled body refuses to remain the 'other' by framing the performance in the 'normality' of a shopping mall. She argues that it is through displaying multiple layers which makes it difficult to attach any stereotypical narratives of disability to the performance.

Küppers states that although Loffler's performance attempted to distract the viewer from reading stereotypical narratives of disability, some viewers held specific assumptions about Loffler's agency and made complaints about her "being made" a spectacle. As already mentioned Loffler performed behind a shop window and perhaps some viewers saw her as being put on display similar to that of a manikin used to display a shop's clothing. However Küppers states that people with disabilities are often viewed as being trapped by their bodies and are therefore denied choice and self-determination. A disabled performer is excluded from self-representation while a nondisabled performer might be praised for representing an individual with a disability. Küppers gives the example of the Hollywood film industry's history of presenting Oscar Awards to nondisabled actors for playing disabled roles, such as Dustin Hoffman who played an autistic man in Rain Man, or Tom Hanks who played a man with learning and developmental disabilities in Forrest Gump. The assumption that performers with disabilities are vulnerable to being made spectacles of, and are less valued for their own self-representation within their work than those who represent them, is brought to dance performances by viewers who hold these beliefs (even if unconsciously). The beliefs and experiences that viewers have and their reasons for going to disability performances are likely to effect the reading of a performance. Even scholars of disability and dance read performance in different ways depending on their specific lens of focus, resulting in contrasting conclusions of a particular work. There is an interactive, reciprocal nature between production and reception of a work, which must be taken into consideration when writing about or creating a dance performance.

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid, 61.
76 Küppers 2003 53.
2.1. Viewing strategies

As I have shown above, Albright investigates primarily how the disabled dancing body can either reconfigure or reinforce the image of the "ideal" dancing body. A reconfiguration that she argues is achieved through an inclusive dance aesthetic that promotes ongoing, reciprocal movement between bodies. Küppers, on the other hand, analyses how disability is performed by disabled dancers, and gives examples of techniques used to destabilise and rewrite cultural narratives of disability. Both Küppers and Albright have provided analyses of the dance film *Outside In*, which was made for a BBC Dance for the Camera series. The film is a collaboration between American choreographer Victoria Marks and director Margaret Williams, and is performed by the integrated company CandoCo. There is no narrative but the film consists of motifs such as leaving 'impressions', for example tracks from wheelchairs, footprints and finger prints in sand and paint. There are displays of affection through kisses, and tango variations in a scenery of blue skies, green fields and abandoned buildings. The film consists of three disabled dancers and three nondisabled dancers. They dance in various spaces within the abandoned building and in a vast green field performing a mixture of duets and group phrases. The film begins with the dancers passing breath and kisses in a line from one dancer to the next as the camera at close up pans to the left. In the end viewers watch as the performers with their back to the camera follow a track through a green valley.

Küppers states that in the film the disabled body is presented as an active body. One of the dancers, David Toole has no legs and uses his strong upper body and large hands to move easily and smoothly through space, as well as moving to and from his chair.77 There is also a dependence on bodily cues for camera movements, such as a turn of the head or raising of the eyebrow, which represent the disabled dancers as movers and manipulators within the film. Küppers claims that this refuses narratives of 'passive victim', instead reclaiming the disabled body as a site of action.78 By contrast, Albright states that CandoCo's reliance on Toole's exceptional ability

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77 Ibid, 66.
78 Ibid, 67.
recreates distinctions between the classic or virtuosic body and the grotesque or passive body. In this film Toole is physically active and interactive in comparison to the other two dancers who use wheelchairs. Albright explains that the wheelchair dancers remain relatively passive while dancers on legs assist, tip, and turn the dancers in their chairs, which reinforces the idea that being outside a wheelchair is more interesting than being in one. In their analyses Küppers appears to focus primarily on the disabled dancers and their role within the film and Albright makes comparisons and looks at the interactions between the dancers. It makes sense then that they came to different conclusions out of the same performance. When I initially watched the film I too noticed the passivity of the wheelchair choreography. My lack of knowledge about cinematography at the time and my interest in the choreography meant that I simply did not take into consideration an interaction between the camera movements and the dancers' movements. When people watch dance, whether it is a concert dance or dance film, their experience and knowledge on the subject matter effects the reading of a performance.

Sarah Whatley (2007), a dance scholar, researched different viewing strategies when watching disabled dancers. It is important to discuss how a dance might be viewed because it serves as a reminder of the complex interaction between the production and reception of a dance performance. An awareness of the possible multiple viewing positions allows for reflexivity when analysing, writing or choreographing work. Whatley argues that viewers are likely to bring certain preconceptions and expectations to the performance, which will influence an individual's viewing strategy. A particular frame of reference when watching a performance might determine what aspects of a performance are attended to and the kind of expectations an individual has about elements such as the level of artistry and virtuosity. Whatley points out that a spectator's viewing position may shift as the performance progresses, as there is a dynamic relationship between the performer and viewer. Different choreographic approaches might promote a particular viewing position, and factors such as proximity, setting and the viewers' prior experience will also have an impact.

79 Albright, 1997, 78.
80 Albright, 1997, 81.
81 Whatley 2007, 9.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid, 10.
Whatley proposes five viewing strategies: passive oppressive, passive conservative, post-passive, active witness and immersion. I completed an internet search of integrated dance reviews to provide examples of each viewing strategy. The five reviews range from the years 2000 – 2007 and include the following integrated companies: AXIS dance company (Oakland USA), CandoCo and Cleveland Dancing Wheels.

a) The passive oppressive strategy relates to a voyeuristic gaze in which the body is viewed as being on display. The experience of watching a disabled dancer perform is that of spectacle, which reinforces the notion of disability as ‘other’ and assumes the performer lacks agency. Of course, dancers in general could be seen to be on display. Researchers such as Christy Adair have argued that the voyeuristic gaze in dance is promoted through an element of traditional and contemporary dance performance, that is, display: dancers learn to present themselves for the pleasure of the audience. The difference between nondisabled and disabled dancers is that viewers see nondisabled dancers as displaying 'beauty' and disabled dancers as presenting negative images, such as 'passive victim' and freak show. A much debated and criticised article by dance critic Arlene Croce had such a reaction to Still/Here, a choreography by Bill T. Jones. Still/Here explores the highs and lows of the lives of people with terminal illness and how they would imagine their own deaths. Croce views disabled performers as “tragic victims” and accuses choreographers such as Bill T. Jones of taking advantage of such individuals. Croce states that she cannot “review someone she feels sorry for, such as over weight dancers, old dancers and dancers with physical deformities...” or someone she is forced to feel sorry for such as “dissed blacks, abused women, or disfranchised homosexuals...”. However, in my search for integrated dance reviews, I have not found many examples that fit this particular strategy. This could be due to a range of reasons. Not many critics might admit to such a view, even if they held it, in particular after controversial comments such as Croce’s caused much discussion on the topic of 'victim art'. The increasing visibility of the disability arts movements and outspoken

84 Ibid, 11.
86 Croce 1994, 55.
87 Ibid.
disabled artists assists to dispel public notions around spectacle and lack of agency.

b) The **passive conservative** strategy refers to individuals who judge integrated dance with an internalised expectation of a classical aesthetic. Choreographers themselves may promote this through choreography that reflects the classical body through the disabled dancers. However, Whatley also points out that even when a choreographer challenges classical ideals, if viewers do not actively question their own perspectives, their judgement and interpretation may still adhere to such expectations.\(^8^8\) Most of the reviews I read, though mostly positive, did appear to compare the choreography of the integrated performances to more traditional movement forms, such as the examples below:

This is especially mesmerizing during the full company simple yet elegant promenades (slow revolutions in one spot), which the other six dancers do on both legs or in their wheelchairs. Although traditionally always performed balanced on a single supporting leg, there is something uncanny when there is no second foot present as a "fall back" for the classical manoeuvre.\(^8^9\)

With ten segments comprising solos, duets and group work, it displayed Elkins' offbeat humour and trademark style that combined contemporary movement with the high kicks and flowing rhythm of Brazilian capoeira, but obviously adapted to the unique personality of the company. While lacking the fluidity of full-bodied movement, the handicapped dancers admirably stood their own against their able-bodied counterparts, equally engaged in highlighting life's lighter moments.\(^9^0\)

In one of the critiques the reviewer does not openly compare the dancers to a classical dance aesthetic but does appear to bring an 'ablest' perspective to the review of the performance. There are judgements on what looks 'pretty' and what does not, including an assumption that a true presentation of disability is of "frustration, desire and longing."\(^9^1\) The quote below demonstrates ablest assumptions of beauty:

\(^{88}\) Whatley 2007, 11.
\(^{89}\) Ibid.
\(^{90}\) Tay 2000, http://inkpot.com/theatre/00reviews/00revcanddancecomp.html.
\(^{91}\) Tay 2000, http://inkpot.com/theatre/00reviews/00revcanddancecomp.html.
The sight of paraplegics dragging themselves by their upper bodies, their lower extremities sliding flaccidly around the floor, was in itself another way of saying "reality is not pretty, deal with it."\textsuperscript{92}

c) In the third position, post-passive, disability is discounted or erased when viewing a performance. The viewer looks for how disability is transcended, thereby making this aspect of performance invisible when interpreting or judging the work.\textsuperscript{93} In the three quotes below, praise is given to the dancers' or the choreographers' apparent abilities to cover the fact that some of the dancers have a disability.

It wasn't until the second dance that Janet Ressler, arts administrator extraordinaire (herself a former dancer and mother of a professional one), realized that the woman doing the pas de deux (dance for two) in the first dance was missing her lower leg. Now that's athleticism and dancing at its finest!\textsuperscript{94}

I adored his lithe, springy bounds and rebounds, and constantly had to remind myself that he was missing a limb. Later on I discovered he's had only two years of solid dance training, and was impressed all the more.\textsuperscript{95}

CandoCo is of course a company known for the way in which they embrace both able-bodied and disabled dancers, but what's interesting about The Stepfather is that you only really become aware of the dancers' disabilities fairly late on, so well has Pita incorporated them into the piece. Nadia Adame, for instance, walks with a crutch, but her wiggling walk is turned into something hypnotic and seductive – and strangely disturbing.\textsuperscript{96}

d) When viewing from an active witness position, disabled dancers are seen to create new ways of interpreting the body in dance that allows a shift in aesthetic and a less judgmental view of the body. Through viewing in this way disability becomes 'ordinary', another source of possibility within dance performance, but it still carries

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Whatley 2007, 11-12.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
the potential for change. Whatley cites Küppers who points out that some of the responsibility lies within the performance to encourage this particular kind of viewing experience. If a choreography explores the movement possibilities of each dancer rather than trying to fit dancers into a classic aesthetic, then viewers may be more likely to see a dance performance from the active witness position described above. In the quote below, the reviewer appears to view the dance work from an active witness position because s/he describes some of the unique movements that are possible with a wheelchair rather than look for how disability might be transcended:

...the program's second work, A Wing/A Prayer by choreographer Mark Tomasic, sent three wheelers aggressively racing across the stage to the upbeat music of Afro Celt Sound System. The work pushed the wheelers in daring pops and rocking of their chairs along with precision turns and group formations. A clear standout in the work, dancer Charlotte Heppner zipped about with ferocity and abandon giving life to the type of work DW would do well to offer more of to its audiences.

e) Immersion strategy is a highly active position where the viewer experiences the ongoing process within the work and lets go of any prior expectations. In this strategy, viewers use the presumption of difference to experience their own "becoming" through engagement with the performance. Whatley explains that for this reason, movement forms such as improvisation may promote viewing from an immersion strategy. Whatley also states that perhaps this is a more familiar strategy for dancers as they are likely to have an embodied knowledge of movement and movement forms employed within a performance. I did not find any reviews that fit this viewing strategy. In Carrie Sandahl's article Ahhhh Freak Out!, a paper which focuses on issues within disability and performance, I did find a quote which reflects this strategy of viewing:

When I watch wheelchair dancer Charlene Curtis of Seattle's Light Motion company, her body melds with her chair as she glides and slides through space, and I cannot disconnect her from her body. She is not "despite" her body. She is her body.

97 Ibid, 12.
98 Whatley 2007, 12.
100 Ibid.
The reviewers often employ more than one viewing strategy throughout the performance. For instance, Tarin Chaplin who critiqued *AXIS*, and Malcolm Tay who critiqued *CandoCo*, both wrote from post passive and passive conservative strategies. It is obvious that these two viewing strategies are closely related. If a viewer is looking at a performance with an expectation of a classic aesthetic, then it would also make sense that they would look for how difference is hidden or covered over. When viewing from a passive perspective disabled dancers would be praised for their ability to adhere to the classic image, just as nondisabled dancers would be judged on keeping their mouth closed or perfecting the illusion of weightlessness. To repeat Bakhtin's quote: "That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts or branches off is eliminated, hidden or moderated. All orifices are closed."\(^{102}\)

The particular viewing strategy employed is dependent on a number of factors: the expectations that viewers bring to the performance, their openness to question their own judgement of the work, the choreography itself and so on. The expectations that someone brings to a performance are likely to be a combination of their own knowledge and experience of integrated dance as well as the frame of reference that a specific work provides, such as the way in which a dance event advertises itself. The descriptions and graphics used in advertisements, the location and price of the event are all factors that direct the viewer toward certain expectations of an upcoming performance.\(^{103}\) For example, Albright describes a photograph from Cleveland Dancing Wheels' promotional material. Albright states that in the photograph company founder, Verdi-Fletcher, who is a wheelchair user, is being held by surrounding dancers giving the illusion that she is standing. The supporting caption states "A Victory of Spirit Over Body". This could suggest transcendence over disability within a Dancing Wheels performance and therefore encourage a post-passive viewing strategy. Once in the performance setting, factors such as the physical seating and performing arrangement, the program titles and notes and the nature of the program will also influence the viewers' reading of the dance.\(^{104}\)

Whatley does not make clear whether the viewing strategies are from a nondisabled

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102 Bakhtin 1968, 203.
103 Foster 1986, 59-60.
104 Foster 1986, 60-62.
viewer's perspective only, or from the perspectives of both disabled and nondisabled viewers. Are there different kinds of viewing strategies dependent on whether the viewer is disabled or nondisabled? For instance, an audience member who uses a wheelchair might be more likely to look at whether the choreography explores new and interesting ways of moving with a chair because of their own experience of wheelchair use and therefore view from an active witness position. However, an individual with a disability might still have an internalised expectation of a classic aesthetic and firm beliefs about what dance is and who can dance, which may or may not include integrated dance. The classification of possible viewing strategies could be useful for analysing how audience members' attitudes and views of disability dance have or have not changed over time. To extend on what I have done in this section I could collate integrated dance reviews from over the last twenty years and classify the reviews according to the viewing strategies to look for any particular patterns. An awareness of these viewing strategies may assist integrated dance practitioners to consider how their work could be read by viewers during the process of creating a dance performance. In an educational setting it would be useful to know students' particular viewing positions of a work for instance, in order to stimulate discussion about why individuals hold these particular views. There are many possible uses for these viewing strategies, however questions such as the differences between disabled and nondisabled viewers may still need to be explored.

2.2. Embodied Experiences

Literature on dance and disability is often focused on the representation of the disabled dancing body as opposed to dancers' embodied experiences, that is, material experiences and physical sensations of dance artists. However, this section explores the embodied experiences of dancers, choreographers, directors and designers focusing on their involvement in an integrated dance group. The information was obtained from a range of sources including television documentaries, current affairs television series, and a journal article, all of which contain interviews of integrated dance professionals.

Two of the three television documentaries and the two current affairs programmes feature stories about New Zealand's Touch Compass Dance Trust, spanning the years 1998-2008. The combination of these documentaries provides a
historical overview of the company’s development: since its founding in 1997 to the present day. A third documentary is shot in the UK and features New Zealand dancer Suzanne Cowan and her work colleagues from the CandoCo dance company. Lastly, the journal article written by art critic and dramaturge, Jeroen Peeters, includes a discussion with choreographer and performer, Frank Bock and director and designer, Simon Vincenzi about their seven-year collaborative research and performance project *Invisible Dancers*. It is important to recognise that each different source of information has a particular focus and therefore effects the range and kinds of questions asked, responses given and the editing process. This section is an initial investigation into some of the embodied experiences of members of integrated companies and participants of projects that include blind performers. This enables me to gain some insight into the material experiences of integrated dance professionals rather than attending only to theoretical aspects of disability within dance performance.

The range of experiences discussed by the disabled dancers in the interviews included motivations for dancing, personal achievements, skill development and expressions of anxieties and fears. Three dancers, namely Jesse Steele (*Catherine Chappell and Dancers*, 1998), Lusi Faiva (*Open Door, 2002*) and Kate Marsh (*CandoCo, 2002*) express their motivations for dancing. Jesse Steele describes social aspects of dancing for Touch Compass, “I like Catherine, Allison, Rodney, my friend here...”. Steele, who has Down Syndrome, is a founding member of the company and indicates that he has gained many friends through his involvement in the company. Faiva also expresses her enjoyment in developing friendships with a diverse range of people and being a part of a supportive environment, and Marsh states that she joined CandoCo because she was looking for role models. In terms of people with disabilities, the experience of isolation appears to be well documented,\(^\text{105}\) therefore the importance of social interaction within the company is not surprising. Nondisabled dancer Sumara Fraser discusses the level of camaraderie experienced dancing with Touch Compass:

There's a lot more camaraderie I find working with these guys because we all have to share the responsibility with each other...we spend a lot more time communicating and socialising in a sense.\textsuperscript{106}

It appears then that the social aspects of the company are highly valued by dancers with and without disabilities.

Steel, also aims to achieve much recognition as a professional dancer, stating "...I'm going to be a famous dancer." Many individuals with intellectual disabilities have low self-esteem and low aspirations due to the impact of stereotypes, such as being childlike and less than human.\textsuperscript{107} Steele's confidence may be attributed partly to his relationships with other company members, and the working process of the company that gives all dancers a voice within the choreographic process. This is not to say that Steele did not have a positive sense of self prior to joining the company. Faiva and Marsh too express motivations for performance beyond the social aspects. Faiva states that she feels proud to perform alongside dancers who aim to produce great work\textsuperscript{108} and Marsh joined CandoCo to be a part of something she saw as pioneering.\textsuperscript{109} Marsh's and Faiva's comments reflect a discussion on disability arts by authors Elspeth Morrison and Vic Finkelstein who state that disability arts and culture provide a medium of communication, an active avenue to challenge narrow thinking and assumed dependency, and a way in which to confirm one's own identity.\textsuperscript{110}

Many of the other dancers with disabilities expressed personal achievements and lessons they had learnt through working in an integrated company. Cowan, in \textit{CandoCo} (2002) points out an important lesson in team work:

> Basically you learn to look out for other people and you learn that actually it's not just about you, you're one of seven dancers, and what everyone else is doing is just as important...\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{106} Fraser 1998, in \textit{Catherine Chappell and Dancers}.
\textsuperscript{107} Sprague & Hayes 2000, 681.
\textsuperscript{108} Faiva 2002, in \textit{Open Door}.
\textsuperscript{109} Marsh 2002, in \textit{CandoCo}.
\textsuperscript{110} Morrison & Finkelstein 1993, 128.
\textsuperscript{111} Cowan 2002, in \textit{CandoCo}. 
While Cowan discusses group dynamics, David Locke and Rodney Bell talk about continuing to develop their repertoire of movement. Locke, a CandoCo dancer states in *CandoCo* (2002) that through working with different choreographers and other dancers he has discovered the ongoing process of extending beyond his limitations. So with continued training and performance, Locke has taken note of the progressive advancements in his skills as a dancer. Bell explains in *Catherine Chappell and Dancers* (1998) how he has gained more confidence to explore movement and to express his emotions through movement. Cowan (*CandoCo, 2002*) and Bell (*Open Door, 2002*) also discuss their development as professional dancers in terms of the technical skills they have learnt, specifically weight-sharing and counter-balance:

...so it does involve a lot of trust in each other, that someone’s going to catch you, that someone’s going to support you...also knowing how much weight you can give at a particular time and how much weight that particular person can take...\(^{112}\)

...she [Chappell] taught us how to use our body weight and counter balance with people...especially from a chair perspective, there’s a lot to be taken into consideration, like me, my balance is terrible,\(^{113}\) so to have someone else come and lean on me would be terrible.\(^{114}\)

For both dancers it was important that all company members learn the skills of weight sharing, counter balance, and trust, and to learn how to apply these skills to other dancers with physicalities different from their own. All of these elements are principles of contact improvisation, which is a movement form both CandoCo and Touch Compass train in. Whatley states that while in the UK disabled dancers have become more established in mainstream dance, training for disabled dancers remains at the margins within institutions catering predominantly for non-disabled dancers.\(^{115}\) I believe this is also true in New Zealand, as many of the Touch Compass dancers, such as Bell, have never had any formal training before entering the company or the company’s workshops. It makes sense then that the dancers interviewed are noticing a progressive development in their skills as performers, much more so than non-disabled dancers who may have already had considerable training and experience.

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112 Cowan 2002, in *CandoCo*.
113 In the 60 minutes interview Chappell explained that this was because Rodney has no abdominal muscle use.
114 Bell 2002, in *Open Door*.
115 Whatley 2007, 1.
There were some initial fears when CandoCo's co-founder and artistic director, Celeste Dandeker (CandoCo, 2002) first returned to the dance studio years after her spinal injury:

I thought, you know, dance was not an option for me anymore...I was a bit nervous being in a studio with able-bodied dancers...there was no way I could emulate what they were doing but with the kind of knowledge and background I had of dance I felt I could be true about the movement I was making...116

Dandeker believed she could not remain a dancer after her accident but discovered that her previous experiences as a professional dancer gave her confidence to explore and create new movement as a wheelchair dancer. Touch Compass dancers, Faiva in the Open Door documentary, and Bell in Catherine Chappell and Dancers (1998) also express their initial beliefs about what was possible as wheelchair users:

I never thought I could dance. My movements were quite limited when I first started. But in six long years I've been dancing I've made huge improvements.117

It never crossed my mind to do that [dance], you sort of restrict yourself once you're in a wheelchair...you think, nah I can't dance...118

It appears that Dandeker, Faiva and Bell all had preconceived notions about what they could do as wheelchair users. Cultural images and discourses about being "wheelchair bound", and images of the ideal dancing body as lean, flexible, graceful and upright contribute, of course to ideas about what is achievable for a wheelchair user. The lack of visibility of integrated dance when the three dancers above began performing may have also contributed to their anxieties. Lusi is a founding member of Touch Compass and Bell joined not long after; given that Touch Compass was the first integrated dance company in New Zealand, there were no local role models for these individuals to aspire to.

Dancers without disabilities certainly do not have a lack of role models in the contemporary dance field nor are they faced with images of passivity because they are 'leg users'. However, two nondisabled female dancers who were interviewed ten

116 Dandeker 2002, in CandoCo.
117 Lusi 1998, in Catherine Chappell and Dancers.
118 Bell 1998, in Catherine Chappell and Dancers.
years apart also express some anxieties as new members of Touch Compass. Rather than doubting whether they were able to dance, their fears stemmed from dancing with people with disabilities for the first time. The first quote is from Close Up (2008) and the second quote is from 60 Minutes (1998).

The first two days were really challenging for me because I didn't know how to relate to the chair... I know her [Lusi's] body a bit more now.119

I've had no experience in being around people with disabilities so I was quite scared I guess, I didn't know how to react or communicate at all and through the process of the work I did actually find ways of breaking down those boundaries...120

In these quotes the dancers express a personal need to learn how to move and communicate with dancers with disabilities as they lacked such experience. Through working alongside their colleagues it appears that these nondisabled dancers grew in confidence over time in their ability to interact and move with them. Albright discusses her own experience of moving with Emery Blackwell, a dancer with a physical disability, for the first time. She kept thinking she was going to 'crush' him and related this to perceptions of the disabled body as a fragile body. Albright also stated that continuing to dance with Blackwell allowed her to let go of these false perceptions.121

Bock and Vincenzi gave some insights into their preconceived perceptions regarding the experience of blindness when they began their seven-year project Invisible Dancers. Over the seven years Bock (choreographer and performer) and Vincenzi (director and designer) collaborated with various blind and sighted dancers. The collaborations took place through a series of workshops focusing primarily on the visual sense. The sighted dancers involved in the early stages of the project used blindfolds as a way to enter and explore a space. During these workshops Vincenzi talks about having a view of blindness as a metaphor for “visionary, as the one that can see or sense”.122 However he realised once he started working with blind

120 Fraser 1998, in 60 Minutes.
121 Albright 1997, 87.
122 Bock in Peeters 2006, 17.
performer Tim Gebbels that this metaphor was not relevant. The choreographers became more aware of some of the difficulties they had not experienced as sighted people, for instance how to find an empty seat on a crowded train without touching anyone inappropriately. Bock and Vincenzi were self-reflective in admitting that working with performers with unique sensory functions, such as people who are blind or deaf will always be, to use their words, 'exotic'. However they had a better understanding of some of the issues involved. For instance they realised that some people who are blind are not always aware when someone new enters a room, so it became routine to make an announcement when someone had entered the studio.123

There are different reasons for why these three groups formed. In the article written by Peeters, it appears Bock and Vincenzi are curious about how people with specific disabilities, such as blindness, move through space. They invite performers with disabilities to work with them in order to explore these curiosities. As Vincenzi states:

One of the first reasons to work with the blind performer Tim Gebbels...was to know what it was, or to start looking at what it was, not being able to open your eyes...for us it became a space of imagining, and attuning to the senses in a different way...124

However companies such as CandoCo and Touch Compass do not specifically include disabled dancers only to explore such curiosities and questions posed by the founders of the groups. These companies instead integrate disabled and nondisabled dancers to promote diversity, to provide training, performance and choreographic opportunities to professional disabled dancers, and to challenge ablest beliefs.125 These different approaches demonstrate the varying degrees of integration within companies and collaborative projects.

There was a lack of embodied experiences noticeable on the part of the nondisabled dancers within the documentaries. The nondisabled dancers often talked about their ideological viewpoint on integrated dance or discussed the aesthetic of contact improvisation, the latter more so in relation to the Touch Compass documentaries.

123 Ibid, 18.
124 Vincenzi in Peeters 2006, 17.
This is perhaps a reflection on the types of questions asked and decisions made around editing. Some of the documentaries focused primarily on the disabled dancers. For instance the earlier Touch Compass documentaries shown in 1998 explored the disabled dancers' lives and how they became dancers. This makes sense considering professional disabled dancers' and integrated dance were a very new phenomena in New Zealand when Touch Compass stepped onto the contemporary dance scene.

Disabled dancers are hypervisible on stage because viewers are likely to know there will be performers with disabilities prior to viewing a dance work and because often their physicality is different from what the audience is used to seeing. The classical dancing body is disrupted by the presence of heterogeneous bodies on stage, however classic aesthetics can be rewritten onto the disabled body through choreography and movement that reinforces rather than challenges such aesthetics. Integrated companies must therefore decide whether they want to fit into these ideals or promote new ones, whether they want to cover over disability, exaggerate it or make a point of performing disability in a variety of ways that moves beyond stereotypes. These kinds of decisions will obviously guide viewers to specific interpretations of a performance, but it cannot be ignored that the audiences' expectations, beliefs and prior experience of dance and of disability will effect how a dance work is viewed. In some ways, part of a successful performance could be that an audience member who at the beginning of a performance views the work from a passive perspective (such as looking for ways disability has been transcended) changes their point of view to a more active position (for instance by seeing how different physicalities have informed the performance).

Let us not forget the dancers themselves! The embodied experiences of dancers are often neglected in dance research, including explorations into integrated dance. This chapter gave some initial insight into disabled and non-disabled dancers' actual material experiences of working and performing together. A more in-depth qualitative analysis in this area of research would be beneficial. The next chapter will explore the development of the disability social movement and how the movement along with developments in post-modern dance made possible the birth of integrated dance within and outside of New Zealand.
3.1. Disability in New Zealand: A Brief Historical Overview

Society influences dance and dance influences society. Therefore, the emergence of integrated dance in New Zealand is likely to be connected to socio-political initiatives, changes in attitudes towards people with disabilities and an increasing visibility of people with disabilities. Due to the reciprocal nature of dance and the society in which it is performed it is important that I briefly address the socio-historical and political changes described above. Since 19th century colonial New Zealand, a gradual shift has occurred from nondisabled peoplespeaking on behalf of disabled people, to disabled people speaking on their own behalf. Disabled people were viewed as destitute and helpless from approximately the mid-19th century through to the 1970s. Pressure on the state to provide some assistance came predominantly from nondisabled parents, politicians, executives of voluntary agencies, medical professionals, jurists and those working in the social work field. There was an emphasis on institutionalisation and minimal welfare provisions, with rehabilitation provided predominantly for ex-servicemen of World Wars One and Two. There was also minimal effort to improve the position of people with disabilities in society. Beatson, for instance, notes that people with disabilities were still placed on the margins of society, either segregated in residential facilities or sheltered workshops. Even if individuals were living at home they were not encouraged or did not have the access to be involved in community life.

In the 1970s a shift towards normalisation and integration within the community began, with an emphasis on deinstitutionalisation and community care. There were

126 Beatson 2000, 243-246.
127 Ibid, 247.
128 Beatson 2000, 249.
129 Ibid, 250.
still instances of segregation, such as in the area of education. Children with "minor" disabilities were integrated into ordinary schools while children with more "severe" disabilities remained in special schools or classes. Normalisation, while promoting that disabled people should have 'valued' roles within the community, did nothing to address the problem that many people with disabilities were reliant on service provision. Also, those committed to the idea of normalisation did not investigate how to remove the material constraints imposed on individuals with intellectual disabilities, which limited choice and impoverished their lives. Individuals with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, were still viewed as dependent minorities, and as a result any community care was controlled by nondisabled people. This approach to human services still adhered to the individualised and medicalised views of disability.

In the 1970's there was policy change which demonstrated some acknowledgement of the social causes of disabilities. One of the provisions of the 1975 Disabled Persons' Community Welfare (DPCW) Act was the promotion of accessibility to public buildings. Promoting change to the physical environment to enhance accessibility was an important provision as earlier policy prior to the 1970's, according to historian Margaret Tennant (1996), assumed that people should 'fit' into their surroundings or remain hidden in their home (or institution). This could be seen to demonstrate the beginning of changes in perspective from a medical model point of view to a social model perspective. The modern disability movement has used the social model of disability to redefine disability in more positive terms, to establish a common identity and develop a collective action against discriminating policies and practices within society, in and outside of New Zealand. During the 1980s, many minority groups worldwide, including people with disabilities, began to voice their right to have control over their own lives and make decisions that directly affect them. The socio-political rights that disabled people demanded included firstly to be consulted when decisions are made on their behalf; the demand for true partnership and power sharing; and

130 Tennant 1996, 25
132 Ibid.
134 Finkelstein 1993, 15.
lastly the demand for complete autonomy and self-governance.¹³⁶

Two media innovations facilitated the development of a collective identity among disabled people in New Zealand.¹³⁷ AID magazine, an abbreviation of Advancing the Interests of the Disabled, later known as NZ Disabled, began publishing in 1980. Soon after National Radio began broadcasting a regular Sunday afternoon disability programme, Future Indicative, now called One in Five. The Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA) was formed in 1983 and established a constitution which demanded a majority of people with disabilities on its committees.¹³⁸ This demonstrates the demand for partnership and power-sharing during this period. Locally the DPA was involved in the administration of mobility services and teletext information services and monitored accessibility to buildings. Nationally the organisation fought for adequate income levels and the removal of discrimination against disabled people. They made progress on the latter in 1993 when the Human Rights Commission Act was amended so that it would be illegal to discriminate against someone on the grounds of disability.¹³⁹ Since then the Health and Disability Commissioner Act (1994, amendments made in 2003) was established to protect the rights of health consumers and disability service consumers.¹⁴⁰ More recently the 2007 Repeal of the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act 1960 gave people working in sheltered workshops the right to minimum wage and holiday and sick leave entitlements.¹⁴¹

Beatson divides the above historical changes into four stages. The first stage concerns obtaining welfare provisions, and the second stage is “integration and normalisation.” The third stage is the “disability social movement: consultation and partnership,” where disabled people demanded more control over their own lives through consultation on decisions that directly affect them and through representation politically and in disability organisations. The fourth stage is the “disability social movement: identity and self-governance,” which involves disabled people demanding

¹³⁶ Beatson 2000, 253.
¹³⁷ Ibid, 262.
¹³⁸ Ibid., 263.
¹³⁹ Ibid, 265.
respect for their disability identity and right to autonomy, as well as the demand for control over their own organisations. For instance this fourth stage was reached by the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind when its board members became truly accountable to its members. In 2003, their constitution was amended so that the entire trust board is now elected by and answerable to its members.

These stages are not linear progressions, but often overlapping developments which demonstrate shifts in political strategies and social attitudes. An example of the overlapping nature of stages of emancipation of people with disabilities was that while consultation and partnership was achieved within the DPA, disabilities services were still to catch up. Martin Sullivan and Robyn Munford discuss language change within disabilities services and how this did not transfer into any real change:

...the use of the terms 'empowerment', 'client' and 'consumer' were part of the ideological apparatus designed to keep the 'customer' happy while the real business of transferring medical control in the institution to service provider control in the community proceeded apace.

Disability services shifted from normalisation to empowerment, which simply masked inequalities experienced by disabled people. In reality many professionals were not equipped to challenge structures that continued to marginalise disabled people. Professionals within disability services also began to call disabled people 'client' or 'consumer' instead of 'patient'. However, the professional maintained control and ownership over the service provision and the 'client's' knowledge was discounted as subjective rather than seen as legitimate and authentic. This demonstrates a failed shift from a medical model to a social model approach to services and a failure to achieve true consultation and partnership.

The 2001 New Zealand Disability Strategy demonstrates Beatson's third stage,

142 Beatson 2000, 246.
143 Ibid.
144 Sullivan & Munford 2005, 27.
146 Ibid, 26-27.
147 "The New Zealand Disability Strategy: Making a World of Difference, Whakanui Oranga."
namely consultation and partnership. The strategy is made up of 15 objectives, developed with input from the disability sector, such as representatives from the DPA. It was set up to guide government action to promote a more inclusive society and to ensure that disabled people are considered before making decisions. The definition of disability described in the publication states that:

> Disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments...Disability is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have.148

The above definition reflects the social model of disability as it highlights the belief that disability is not inherent within an individual with an impairment but caused by discriminating factors within society. Particularly relevant to my thesis is objective nine of the strategy which lists a number of actions that support lifestyle choices, recreation and culture for disabled people. In relation to the arts, objective nine states that (a) opportunities will be provided to disabled people for involvement in arts activities and to create their own arts; (b) that arts administrators/organisations will be educated about disability issues and inclusion; (c) that support will be provided for the development of the arts, including those run by and for disabled people,149 which also comprises integrated dance.

### 3.2. Integrated Dance in New Zealand

The disability arts movement is closely connected to the disability social movement as it assists to destigmatise disability, change public perceptions by forcing non-disabled people to evaluate their own preconceived notions and attitudes towards disability, and enhance self-determination and pride in disability identity.150 This is evident in festivals such as *Giant Leap* held in 2005, New Zealand’s first international disability arts festival, and disability television programmes such as the documentary series *Inside Out* (1998-2004). Such events give visibility to both professional and community artists, including dance artists, who can become role models for disabled

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149 Ibid, 23.
viewers and inform the wider public about disability-related issues.

Dance has provided one avenue for people to take pride in their disability identity and culture. Developments in integrated dance in New Zealand were relatively late compared to some other countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, many dancers and choreographers in USA, although they were not directly working with disabled dancers, included improvisation and physical theatre within their movement style, and thus began challenging what was accepted as dance performance. Adam Benjamin, a choreographer and co-founder of the integrated dance company CandoCo, believes these developments in the postmodern era of dance led the way for the birth of integrated dance. Ann Albright points out that the use of contact improvisation in the 1980s influenced the establishment of integrated dance as there was an increasing interest in the exploration of physical exchange between people with different kinds of physicalities. Steve Paxton, who is known as the father of contact improvisation, co-founded Touchdown Dance in Britain in 1986, a dance company for partially sighted, blind and sighted dancers. In 1991, CandoCo was founded and became the first professional integrated dance company to tour nationally and internationally. Smith argues that the insistence of CandoCo to be identified within the mainstream context of theatre dance (rather than sidelined to disability arts or community arts) disrupts the historical foundations through which exclusionary aesthetics of dance were formed as discussed in chapter two.

The nineties appear to be the decade in which integrated dance companies began to form in Australasia. In Adelaide, Australia, Restless Dance Theatre was founded in 1991 for young people with and without intellectual disability. This company aims to inspire dancers to create work that is informed by disability culture. In 1997, Weave

151 Trisha Brown challenged what was considered dance performance by taking performance away from the proscenium stage into previously "unused" spaces. Her suspension works down the side of buildings provide examples of this. See Bremser & Jowitt 1999, 38. Choreographers such as Lucinda Childs and Laura Dean rejected characteristics of the expressionistic modern dance opting for a more minimalistic approach, such as "stripped down" vocabulary and repeated movement phrases. See Bremser & Jowitt 1999, 38.
152 Benjamin 2002, 32.
153 Albright 1997, 86.
154 Ibid.
156 Ibid, 38.
157 Smith 2005, 81.
Movement Theatre was founded in Victoria, Australia by Janice Florence, a dance artist who formed the company after becoming paralysed in a fall.\textsuperscript{159} Rawcus is a Melbourne based integrated company which was founded in 2000 through a partnership between an arts organisation, disability service and local government.\textsuperscript{160}

New Zealand's first professional integrated dance company, Touch Compass Dance Trust, was founded in 1997 by Catherine Chappell. It is a non-profit organisation based in Auckland. Another New Zealand integrated dance company is Jolt. Since the company was founded in 2002, it has been providing educational programmes as well as performance opportunities for people with and without disabilities, consisting predominantly of dancers with learning disabilities and autism.\textsuperscript{161} In the following chapter, I will focus on Touch Compass as a case study for dance and disability in New Zealand because the company is more influential and better known than Jolt throughout New Zealand and internationally.

Touch Compass: An Analysis of Past Performances

Touch Compass Dance Trust has lead the way for integrated dance in New Zealand. The trust provides a number of educational programmes, including community classes, professional development for dancers and teachers and school workshops. The company tours nationally and occasionally takes work to Australia. At least two disabled Touch Compass dancers have gained employment within successful international integrated companies, including Rodney Bell who is a member of US based AXIS Dance Company and Suzanne Cowan who has danced with UK based CandoCo. Touch Compass appears to mirror Beatson's third stage of consultation and partnership as the disabled members occupy many roles within the company: as dancers, choreographers and administrators. In the television current affairs show, *60 minutes* (1998), Chappell gives some insight into the company's philosophies. She emphasises the importance of placing high expectations on all the dancers. She states:

> If you expect more of people they come up with the goods, but if you always expect people are not going to be able to do it then they are never going to be able to achieve.\(^{162}\)

When questioned about whether art or therapy comes first, Chappell states that it is art. She adds that any therapeutic gain is just a bi product, which is beneficial for all company members. Touch Compass employs a collaborative approach to choreographic process, which means that dancers and choreographers work together to create their dance performances. In its mission statement and choreographic approach, Touch Compass reflects a social model discourse, as it challenges physical and psychological barriers for performers and audiences, making dance accessible to all people who are passionate about this art form regardless of

\(^{162}\) Chappell 1998, in *60 minutes*. 
their (dis)ability.

The present chapter involves an analysis of three works by Touch Compass Dance Company, spanning the years 1998 to 2003. The differing styles of all three, that is, contemporary dance, dance theatre and dance film, provide a broad perspective of the range of contemporary genres utilised by Touch Compass. My analysis explores the representations of disability within the three works and whether common disability stereotypes are challenged or reinforced. I also discuss whether, and if so, how the works challenge the 'ideal' dancing body and possible viewing strategies that the choreography may invoke.

4.1. This Word Love (1999)

This is a ten minute piece, choreographed by Carla Martell and premiered at Maidment Studio Theatre in Auckland as part of Touch Compass' RESIN8 season in 1999. The work explores expressions of love within human relationships. The set, lighting and space used throughout the entire work is minimalistic. The set incorporates a black wall and black floor, and the lighting consists of four uneven rectangle shapes that hit the wall side by side and expand out onto the perpendicular floor. The dancers use the space framed by the spotlights which consists of the wall, the floor directly below the wall, and the length of the four spotlights side by side. The music, composed by Philip Colson, incorporates four different Jazz tracks. The choreography involves four dancers: two women and two men. One male and one female dancer use wheelchairs and remain in their chairs for the entire dance. The other two dancers appear to be physically non-disabled.

The choreography incorporates many duets that explore love within human relationships. There are five short sections in total, distinguishable by music changes, and pauses in movement. The first section begins with a gestural phrase performed in solo by a female disabled dancer, and in the final section the gestural phrase is performed as a quartet. The gestures suggest everyday activities and emotions. For

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163 Dance theatre combines dance with theatrical elements of stage performance. There may or may not be narrative and dialogue, and there is often an intended reference to reality, such as the use of everyday movement and clothing.

164 RESIN8 is written in text message type format and stands for resonate. The RESIN8 season was made up of five separate works from a range of choreographers.

instance, alternating the hands in up and down movements as if imitating a walking pattern. The soft and flowing gestural movements of the beginning and end sections give the impression of the activities and emotions involved in the everyday cycle of living. There is an emphasis on love gestures within these sections, such as holding the arms in a cross shape against the chest and pulsing the palms of the hands (one hand on top of the other) on the chest.

In the second section the music provides images of romance and seduction and involves a variety of duets. The choreography consists of pushing and pulling movements; the quality of flow follows a releasing and recovering. For instance, the shoulders and arms are pulled forward by a duet partner to initiate the collapse of the torso, then a pull and recovery to an upright position. The duets are performed simultaneously, sometimes in unison and sometimes in differing variations of one phrase. The first two duets separates the sexes which evolve into a duet between the two non-disabled dancers positioned in the middle of the wheelchair dancers. This leads into two duets between the female non-disabled dancer and male wheelchair dancer, and between the female wheelchair dancer and the male non-disabled dancer. The combination of the various duets and the pushing, pulling, releasing, recovering type flow of the phrase suggests the emotional ups and downs of all relationships. While the music might suggest romance, the choreography does not entirely fit with this imagery. The movement and the range of duets seem to introduce the viewer to the variety of human relationships whether kinship, friendship or romantic relationship.

By comparison, the third section involves a duet between the nondisabled dancers and reinforces the nondisabled and disabled dichotomy as the disabled dancers watch the duet unfold from the side lines. The disabled dancers, who remain relatively still, frame a confined space for the nondisabled dancers to move in between. They, in turn, often use the frames of the chairs to prop themselves up and balance on. The movement revolves around tension, resistance, pushing and embracing. For instance, the male dancer with his hand on top of the female dancer’s head pushes her down. She resists as she gradually slides down the wall. The male dancer sits on the female dancer’s lap. But she looks away with a cheeky smile, and pushes the male dancer off. The layered, progressive music provokes carnivalesque
images of drunkenness. The music's quirkiness, the tension and resistance in the movement along with cheeky smiles depict a flirtatious and teasing encounter between a man and a woman. The disabled dancers, throughout the entire duet, sit on the edges and watch. Although probably not done purposefully, the lack of readable sexuality of the disabled dancers during the flirtatious duet described above and in the second section risks reinforcing the assumed asexuality of disabled people. The passivity of the disabled dancers sets up a distinction where the nondisabled dancers are able to flirt and tease with one another and the disabled dancers must only sit and watch.

One of the many conceptualisations of disability is that of asexuality. According to Milligan and Neufeldt (2001) and Tepper (2000) people with disabilities are often represented as uninterested in sex, unable to take part in sexual activity or unable to feel any pleasure from sexual activity.166 This false line of thinking is usually in relation to people with physical disabilities.167 The opposite extreme of the asexuality myth is the cultural belief that people with intellectual and/or psychiatric disabilities have an unrestrained libido. It is assumed that they are unable to control their sexual desires and feelings, and therefore unable to engage responsibly in sexual relationships.168 Nondisabled people commonly believe that it is inappropriate for disabled people to engage in sexual activity and that disabled people should not have children.169 Tepper attributes this belief to traditional cultural perspectives of sex, which promotes reproduction, often ignoring the pleasurable aspect of sex.170 Reproduction is viewed as a privilege of the “fittest” only.171 Cultural myths and beliefs are present within many societal structures. For instance, Anderson and Kitchin (2001) analysed the ways in which disabled people are excluded from the use of Family Planning clinics in Ireland. They found that the clinics were largely inaccessible to disabled people in terms of physical access, information and service provision, which the researchers argued reinforced cultural beliefs of disabled people as being asexual.172

This Word Love appeared to represent the wheelchair dancers

168 Ibid.
169 Anderson & Kitchin 2000, 1166.
171 Ibid.
172 Anderson & Kitchin 2000, 1171.
as asexual through their passivity during the flirtatious duet between the two nondisabled dancers described above.

Spatial framing is a technique that can be used in dance performance for a variety of purposes. I have noted in chapter two that Loffler's performance described by Küppers\(^{173}\) was framed within a shopping mall window. *This Word Love* was performed in a theatre but the entire dance was framed by four spotlights and occasionally the wheelchairs. Loffler's performance focused on a particular way of constructing disability and used the spatial framing of a shop window to challenge disability as "other" by appearing in the normality of a shopping mall. In contrast, *This Word Love* is concerned with the performance of "love" in various relationships. The framing of the work within such a small area provides an intimate atmosphere that supports the reading of the choreography, an exploration of love. When the wheelchairs create an even smaller space for the duet between the non-disabled dancers, the space becomes almost suffocating. This enhances the intensity of the duet and reflects the sexual tension of the encounter between the two dancers.

Moreover, the framing in *This Word Love* sets up a distinction where the disabled dancers appear relatively passive in comparison to the nondisabled dancers. The two disabled dancers often move in the downstage direction, away from the wall, in linear or circular pathways. However, apart from this pathway of movement they remain in the same position, the disabled female dancer is always prompt side and the male disabled dancer on opposite prompt side, while the nondisabled dancers often shift positions throughout the entire work. This gives the impression that an individual can move much more freely on legs than in a wheelchair, and brings forth connotations of being "wheelchair bound" or "confined to a wheelchair". But in fact people who use wheelchairs often find that wheelchairs increase their mobility, speed and agility. People who use wheelchairs also often leave their chairs to pursue activities such as driving, sleeping and swimming.\(^{174}\) In contrast to this fact the use of wheelchairs is often misrepresented in mass media where negatively connoted terms are used rather than "wheelchair user". For instance in a Touch Compass review of *Sequential Roadkill* (2006) the reviewer Francesca Horsley states "...Wheelchair-bound Lusi

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\(^{173}\) Küppers 2003, 60-61.

\(^{174}\) Haller, Dorries, & Rahn 2006, 70; Kailes 1985, 68.
Faiva, a shrill Sarah Campus and Tim Turner as a policeman, each decked in a gaudy glitz... The differences in use of space between the dancers with disabilities compared to the dancers without disabilities and the type of terminology used by Horsley reinforces the notion of the wheelchair as a source of confinement or restriction.

Overall the disabled dancers in this piece remain in a relatively confined spatial area compared to the non-disabled dancers who use the wheelchair frames and the wall to move across, around and over the disabled dancers. This difference might encourage an audience member to make comparisons between the disabled and nondisabled dancers. The distinction and comparison between the disabled and nondisabled dancers may reinforce the classic dancing body as the ideal. For instance, the nondisabled dancers can be seen to quickly shift positions, creating new duets. They easily pop up onto the wheelchair frames and with control balance off the ground. The wheelchair dancers therefore often provide a stable base for the nondisabled dancers to complete acrobatic manoeuvres. The lack of space used and the prop like nature of their role in the choreography make the wheelchair dancers appear quite passive in relation to the nondisabled dancers who appear active and lithe. These distinctions between the disabled and nondisabled dancers encourage audience members to take up a passive conservative viewing position, which involves viewers judging the dance with an expectation of a classic aesthetic. In addition, the easily read flirtatiousness between the nondisabled dancers while the disabled dancers sit watching, risks reinforcing myths of asexuality. Because This Word Love is about love, this dance work would have been a perfect opportunity to reconstruct the association between disability and sexuality by including unconventional images of sexuality in disabled people. However in this piece, the opportunity was missed.

4.2. Lighthouse (2002)

Lighthouse, created in 2002, was directed by Christian Penny and choreographed by Catherine Chappell, with a total of eleven dancers. The 30-minute work is choreographed around an isolated New Zealand fishing village, Ngawi. The most

prominent landmark of this village is a lighthouse. *Lighthouse* incorporates elements of dance theatre (dialogue and movement), aerial dance\(^{176}\) and contact improvisation principles. The main character is a young boy who remains anonymous, whom I will name 'the boy' for this analysis. 'The boy' is played by a male Maori performer. He has an alter ego, a male dancer with Down Syndrome who is a founding member of Touch Compass. 'The boy' has one friend, 'Jack', played by a female Maori performer. 'Jack' comes across as an older man who is quite humorous in personality and well known in the community, an elder perhaps. Chappell plays 'the boy's' mother in one scene, a duet between 'the boy's' mother and his alter-ego. Chappell's change in character from a villager to 'the boy's' mother is shown in costume change. Another dancer plays the role of Mary, a pakeha woman who is researching her family history, in particular that of her mother and grandmother who grew up in Ngawi. She carries a video recorder to document the town and its residents, and talks of the local librarian discovering her grandmother's logbooks. The other characters are the town's villagers played by various dancers ranging from visibly disabled to non-disabled. The movement, narrative and dialogue suggest themes of isolation and community, with much of the dialogue focusing on the disappearance of the boy's mother and his belief that she will return.

*Lighthouse* in general is confusing to follow. The narrative does not have a clear progression but rather the scenes that provoke isolation and community are interdispersed amongst scenes which provide images of the rural setting. As previously stated, most of the dialogue throughout the work centres around the boy whose mother has disappeared. However sometimes there are seemingly unrelated dialogue scenes, such as a lawn bowling lesson between Jack and Mary. The boy appears to have some kind of alter ego. The alter ego in one particular scene functions as a memory of the boy's former self. This scene involves a duet between the alter ego and the boy's mother as the boy slowly moves around the periphery of the stage watching the encounter. Apart from this duet it is difficult to come to some sort of conclusion regarding the function of the boy's alter ego. The dancer who plays the character of the alter ego does not have a speaking role, and he often only shadows the movements of the boy. Powles, author of *Touch Compass: Celebrating Integrated Dance*, cites Penny's own concerns that he did not utilise the dancer who

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\(^{176}\) Aerial dance is the use of a harness system to swing and move above stage.
played this role well enough, which resulted in a lack of visibility of the dancer. In the 60 minutes episode, Dancers' with Wheels (1998) the early life of dancer, Jesse Steele, who performs the alter ego in Lighthouse is discussed. Steele grew up in an isolated part of New Zealand in a small community. His Mother explains that she was advised to give him up as a baby because he had Down Syndrome, which she refused to do. These aspects of Steele’s life are loosely similar to the character ‘the boy’ in Lighthouse, as the boy, whose Mother has actually disappeared, is shown living in a rural New Zealand village. Perhaps then some of Steele’s life influenced the narrative, which is reflected on stage through Steele playing the boy’s alter ego.

As mentioned above, the character of the alter ego is not a speaking role, in fact none of the main speaking roles are played by the performers with disabilities. Employing an actor for a dominant speaking role, such as ‘the boy’, may be inevitable. However the company could have employed an actor with a disability. This contrasts with Lusi’s Eden (2001), in which the main role was played by a dancer with cerebral palsy whom the work was based around. Though this dancer spoke for a length in the beginning of this piece, her words, frequently inaudible were interpreted by another dancer as she spoke. The company members used their own personal experiences to inform the characters they were playing in Lighthouse. It is probable that both the disabled and non-disabled dancers drew on personal experiences of isolation and community during the choreographic process, not focusing specifically on the experiences of the disabled dancers. Despite this possibility, the lack of speaking roles of visibly disabled dancers could be viewed as a restriction of ‘voice’.

The main theme is linked to the sub-narrative as both characters, the boy and Mary, are searching for their origins. Both of these characters neither have a visible disability nor identify themselves as being disabled during the work. However there are links to disability. As already mentioned, ‘the boy’s’ alter ego is played by a dancer who has Down Syndrome. Later in the work the boy sits in a dancer’s electric wheelchair and moves around the stage watching intently the duet between his alter ego and his Mother, perhaps the memories of their last interactions. Therefore it is possible that the themes expressed in Lighthouse are related to disability. However, I

177 Penny in Powles 2007, 79.
178 60 minutes, 1998.
179 Powles 2007, 81.
should point out here that just because a dancer is disabled or there is a wheelchair on stage, this does not mean that the intention behind the dance is about disability. Küppers states:

> When disabled people perform, they are often not primarily seen as performers, but as disabled people. The disabled body is naturally about disability.\(^{180}\)

Küpper's point here is that often when audiences see a performer who has a disability, they see a disabled person who is a performer and often make assumptions about the work based on this point of view. In addition, Albright states that in order to avoid reproducing ablest aesthetics, it is important that companies are conscious about the way in which the disabled body is conceptualised within a choreography.\(^{181}\) Therefore, because viewers do 'see' that some of the dancers have a disability it is important to consider, in an integrated company for example, the types of movements that are made by the dancers and the interactions between the dancers, as this may effect audiences' readings of the work.

It is possible that a false link is being made between the narrative and the experience of disability within this analysis. Firstly, isolation is a theme expressed in other works by Touch Compass. For instance, *Lusi's Eden* communicates how Lusi, who was put in foster care from a young age spent many hours in her room alone. Secondly, as stated in the section on embodied experiences, there has been much documentation on disability and the experience of isolation. In the literature I found regarding isolation was a phenomenological study of a Canadian summer camp for young people with disabilities.\(^{182}\) By attending the summer camp the researchers observed that the campers commonly experienced feelings of 'not being alone', and not feeling like the only one with a disability as they often did during their school year.\(^{183}\) During the school year the campers experienced a lack of opportunities to interact with other young people with disabilities, which the authors termed "disability isolation".\(^{184}\) Factors that contribute to feelings of isolation included living in rural locations, being disadvantaged by others and a lack of understanding by others. The

\(^{180}\) Küppers 2003, 49.
\(^{181}\) Albright 1998, 60.
\(^{182}\) Goodwin & Staples 2005, 160-177.
\(^{183}\) Ibid, 168.
\(^{184}\) Ibid.
summer camp provided youth with a sense of belonging, a safe environment, and opportunities to discuss common issues and experiences with others who “had been there”.  

It is likely that some of the Touch Compass dancers have experienced isolation, loneliness or social exclusion, which would explain why the company has communicated this important issue to its audiences through a number of works. In *Lighthouse*, isolation is apparent as the boy is often positioned on stage by himself, even though other dancers are nearby, and he usually only verbally communicates with Jack. The theme of isolation is emphasised by the rural location, a metaphor perhaps for the boy's own experience of isolation. He is separated out as being different in the beginning. A narrow pool of water situated down stage, lines the length of the stage representing the water's edge of the seaside village. As the boy walks along the water, others stare at him from afar and pity him as they discuss his mother's disappearance. Near the end the boy's alter ego, while looking down, walks slowly across the water's edge as dancers move quickly and dynamically centre stage. The boy walks backwards upstage, across the length of the stage, mimicking his alter ego's path. Then half way across the stage the boy breaks off running fast around the periphery of the stage. There is no interaction between the boy, his alter ego and the other dancers. At the end, the boy's isolation from the rest of the community is most visible as he is left alone holding a bag, standing at the water's edge.

Although there are moments of isolation, there are also scenes which display community, friendship and support. The community interaction within this small village is built up in a playful scene that is reminiscent of festivities during childhood. The movements consist of fast turning, backward rolls, piggy backs, cartwheels, and aeroplane lifts. Contact duets break out into close group movements giving a sense of socialising along with happy, joyful faces. There is a connection between community and the three main characters, 'the boy' and his older friend Jack who are both Maori, and the boy's alter ego who has Down Syndrome. The Maori community is working to regain value in their culture and identity, the pan-disabled community

185 Ibid.
186 After colonisation of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Maori culture was marginalised by the dominant Pakeha culture. For instance, Maori language and cultural practices were excluded from the
are working to have their culture and disability identity recognised. The three main characters might be seen as reflecting their positions in society because both Maori people and disabled people are often positioned as 'other'. In the 'othering' process there is usually a 'norm' or 'ideal' and an undesirable or stigmatised 'other', such as nondisabled and disabled, man and woman, heterosexual and queer. Since the nondisabled category is viewed as the 'ideal', it is assumed that people with disabilities want to be 'normal', which denies the conceptualisation of disability in positive, or at least neutral terms. People then are viewed as being 'trapped' in this undesirable position of 'otherness' and desiring to transcend or overcome their limitations. The community scene at the same time appears to disrupt this dichotomy as it incorporates all performers, which emphasises the diverse nature of the company. Diverse in (dis)abilities, race, gender and age.

There are many duets within the choreography, particularly during the community scene. Most of the duets are between a disabled and a nondisabled dancer. At first it seemed that this pairing set up a dichotomy between disabled or dependent and nondisabled or independent categories. In the past, society has created dependency of disabled people economically, politically, professionally and through representations in the media, arts and literature. By only having disabled/nondisabled duets, the image that people with disabilities are dependent on nondisabled people may be reinforced. However, at closer look, these duets seem to establish a reciprocal relationship. In one duet, two female dancers wear long yellow rain coats. One dancer is very short and is lifted a couple of times by her duet partner. At one point the taller of the two lies on her back on the floor as the short dancer manipulates her arms by placing them in different positions. In another duet between the boy's alter ego and a diver, they take turns at providing a stable position (a wide stance, upper body bent forward with hands on the ground) for the other to complete a backwards walk over their solid, still body. This flows across the length of the stage. These duets function to promote a mutual relationship between people with and without disabilities rather than dependence of one on another.

school curriculum. For further discussions see Walker 1996, 1-7; Mutu 2001, 1-7.
189 Küppers 2003, 51.
190 Oliver 1990, 85-94.
Another duet is played out in a different way from the above. Here a dancer who has limited mobility in his left arm and left leg, places body weight on his right leg when dancing as his left leg is permanently bent. The dancer hops onto stage from opposite prompt side and a nondisabled dancer enters from prompt side. The disabled dancer quickly shuffles on one leg and the other dancer hops in on one leg until finally they meet in the middle. The disabled dancer quickly hops away. The other dancer chases him by hopping too, but then, unable to maintain this, lowers his leg into a run. This idea of utilising the unique style of movement of a dancer with a disability by a nondisabled performer can be seen in other works, such as *The Cost of Living* by the company DV8. There is a role reversal here where the nondisabled dancer is changing to move more like the disabled dancer rather than the other way around. Although one might argue that this simply reinforces the disabled/nondisabled dichotomy, there is a sense of satisfaction, for me at least, when watching an apparently physically nondisabled dancer taking on the movement of a visibly physically disabled dancer. This satisfaction stems from seeing that the nondisabled dancer is unable to maintain a hop and keep up with the disabled dancer's proficient hop. This challenges the idea that people without disabilities or impairments are "able-bodied", as the disabled dancer is shown to be more "able" than the nondisabled dancer. This is similar to the "crutch master" described by Küppers. Here Bill Shannon (the "crutch master"), a street performer, combines hip hop aesthetics, break dance and skateboarding to create acrobatic sequences using his crutches to do everyday things, such as descending stairs. Passers-by offer to help him down the stairs. However without knowing how to effectively assist an individual in this way means that they often become a hindrance. Küppers states that this destabilises movement competence as an assumed difference between people with and without disabilities.

The technique of emphasising the "able-bodiedness" of a disabled performer challenges discourses, such as the medical model, that supports ideals of normality, which an individual with an impairment often feels pressure to change in order to fit more closely with. This situation was described in a previous chapter where Alison Jones experienced pressure to cover her head and wear a silicone-pad prosthesis.

192 Küppers 2003, 61.
after breast cancer treatment. The example described in the above paragraph is the reverse case, as the nondisabled dancer attempts to fit himself with the movement of the disabled dancer, however is unable to maintain the hop and falls into a run. This might challenge medical ideas around people with impairments as deficient or lacking as compared to those without impairment. Moreover, Touch Compass promote collaboration among all company members in their choreographic approach.

Chappell explains that dancers are often given tasks to create material in solos and duets. So it is also possible that the dancers simply feed off one another and share their own unique styles of movement. In doing so, movement that is created during the choreographic process probably reflects the movement styles of the choreographer and dancers, both those with and without disabilities.

In contrast to This Word Love, Lighthouse challenges assumptions around disability and asexuality, as well as images of passivity often associated with the wheelchair. In the community scene, a female dancer with cerebral palsy and a nondisabled male dancer move into a duet. Their body language is shy but also flirtatious. They touch hands and smile at each other and appear to be in intense conversation, ignoring what is happening around them. The scene conjures up images of a sensual encounter between the sexes, and shows positive connotations around dating, disrupting the idea that people with disabilities are or should be asexual. As discussed in the previous analysis, notions of passivity associated with disability can be reflected in the use of expressions such as being 'wheelchair bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'. In This Word Love, the choreography of the wheelchair dancers risks associations with being 'wheelchair bound'. But the alternating use of aerial work and floor work used in Lighthouse challenge such stereotypes and images. This is achieved by exploring movement in spaces outside the 'middle' level that the wheelchair typically provide. In an aerial scene, a dancer who is very short soars high above the stage as six dancers roll on the floor below her. Three dancers, two of whom use wheelchairs, slowly roll and slide on the floor, upstage, opposite prompt side to down stage, beginning from a scene where Jack gives Mary a bowling lesson. However, images of passivity can also be broken down when using a wheelchair, because as I pointed out the analysis of This Word Love, in reality wheelchairs

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193 Chappell 2000, 22.
increase the mobility, speed and agility of wheelchair users. For instance, the dancer who often moves by hopping on one leg uses his wheelchair once in the work to rush onto stage and speedily circle the periphery of the stage.

*Lighthouse* uses life in a rural New Zealand village to explore themes of isolation; a theme which is relevant for many people with disabilities, historically considering the age of institutionalisation and in the present. Moments of isolation are juxtaposed with moments of community which seem to promote the value of being a part of a (dis)abled community, Maori community or a diverse group of New Zealanders bound by geographical location. At the same time, however, the juxtaposition reminds me that an individual can feel isolated amongst family and friends perhaps because they feel different from others or community members lack understanding about their unique physicality. None of the disabled performers had speaking roles. This gave an almost hierarchical impression where only nondisabled dancers had the main, speaking roles and the disabled dancers had supporting roles. This could set up a distinction and encourage a passive viewing position where the nondisabled dancers are seen as the 'ideal' image of a 'performer'. In contrast, an active viewing position is promoted through the movement itself. The choreography does not attempt to fit the disabled dancers into classic aesthetics but demonstrates how individual ways of moving can be a source of material, such as the hopping dancer. Additionally, the idea that people with disabilities are asexual and dependent are challenged in this work by a flirtatious encounter between a disabled and nondisabled dancer, and through the reciprocal nature of the many duets. The wide range of levels used by the dancers who used wheelchairs and the speed at which a dancer moved through the stage space in his chair assists to dispel myths of being 'wheelchair bound'.


*Picnic* is one of Touch Compass's short films; directed by Alyx Duncan (choreographer and videographer) and produced by Catherine Chappell. The film centres around a countryside picnic set in an old run-down, abandoned building. The choreography appears to be improvisational as the dancers explore with movement low to ground in the run-down building then rollick wildly in the open field. The first
shot is of a young girl, who has no hands, and who is perched in a small window frame sleeping. When she awakes, she discovers adults around her having a picnic and attempts to gain their attention. The adults, dressed in beige and white colours have fun as they engage in small groups of two or three, talking, laughing, eating and drinking but shoo the girl away as she approaches them. The girl gives up, sits in the window sill and drifts off to sleep. After some time the adults too fall asleep. The girl awakes again, follows a three legged dog up some stairs and is surprised to find the adults dressed in vibrant reds, who invite her to dance along the grass. The dreamlike atmosphere of the film is emphasised by the increasingly uncontrolled nature of the dancers' movements and symbols, such as bitten apples, which allude to fairytales. The bitten apples may represent the fairytale of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, where the character, Snow White bites into an apple that has a sleeping spell cast onto it. As the credits roll the adults can be seen leaving the picnic area waving goodbye to each other as they go their separate ways. Here the film colour changes to black and white, reminiscent of silent movies. The film is ambiguous as it is difficult to decide what is reality and what is fantasy. This is a typical feature of arthouse cinema, where ambiguity is used to allow for multiple meanings within a film. In addition, categories often perceived as dualistic, such as reality/fantasy, and childhood/adulthood are disrupted as boundaries are blurred making it difficult to distinguish between them.

In the beginning of the film, in the abandoned building, the camera is positioned at a low height remaining here as the camera pans left and right. This part of the film in particular is shot from the young girl's perspective; the viewer sees the world as she would see it. Apart from a short female adult dancer and the wheelchair dancers, the other dancers must sit, lie down and move about in a crouched position to stay within the camera's view. Later in the film (after the girl ascends the stairs) the camera remains at a low position but is held at a high angle so that the viewer must look up at the dancers, which gives power to the performers. The film then progresses from images of confinement, as suggested by the square shapes, the camera that only pans left and right, crouched movements and dull colours, to images of freedom and power, portrayed in the high camera angle, blue ocean, larger movements and vibrant colours. The above transition could be read as an idealistic dream of a changing world, which embraces diversity and empowers all people rather than
restrict and reject minority groups, such as people with disabilities.

To emphasise this theme in the first scene, disability is concealed, in contrast to the second scene where disability is in full view. The wheelchair of a dancer with cerebral palsy is covered with a white cloth in the scene shot in the abandoned building. Her wheelchair is transformed into an arm chair. In the next scene, after the girl climbs the stairs, the wheelchair is no longer covered as the dancer races across the grass in her chair. In addition, it is difficult to recognise that one of the adult dancers is very short in the first scene as everyone moves low to the ground, however in the second part of the film the diverse heights of all the dancers is much more prominent. The film progresses from hiding visual signs of disability to more active and overt images of disability. This demonstrates the initial restrictive view of disability which hides “grotesque” bodies, that is, bodies that are “incomplete” in order to give the illusion of a “classic”, complete body. The narrative then shatters this image through the visible diversity of the performers as they proudly dance in a large open space, full of colour.

The music, costumes, quirky movement and film techniques provide images of carnivalesque festivities. The music provides images of circus and a quirky, fun and dreamy ambience as do the elaborate, colourful costumes in the second half of the film. There is a reflection on the history of film, especially the quiet black and white scene during the credits which resembles silent movies of the late 19th and early 20th century. During the silent era of film, which extended into the beginning of film with speech through to the late 1930s, the film industry used characters with disabilities to portray comic figures, beasts or objects of pity. In Küpper's analysis of the dance film Outside In, she links the film's use of visual curiosity, namely the spectacle of David Toole's dancing, to its use in early cinema and the freakshow. Picnic too seemed to use freak tactics through a combination of allusions to early cinema, carnival type music and costumes, and quirky movement. The movement incorporates strange ways of doing everyday things, which disrupts the idea that there are 'normal' ways of achieving everyday activities. A male dancer, for example, receives a sip of another dancer's drink as he holds his trunk off the ground by

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196 Robert Bogdan explores the freak shows that developed in the United States in the 1840s. He defines the freak show as: “the formally organised exhibition of people with alleged and real physical, mental, or behavioural anomalies for amusement and profit.” Bogdan 1988, 10.
lodging his feet up against a wall, with hands placed on the ground. During the film the characters seem to have an immense amount of fun. This seems to contradict the allusion to the historical use of visual curiosity in film and the depiction of disabled people as comic figures, beasts or objects of pity. It appears Picnic acknowledges that people, particularly those with visible disabilities, may find themselves the object of the ablest gaze. However, it is also evident that as dancers they choose to be on display. As performers they can utilise the choreography, narrative, costumes, film techniques and so on to influence how people see them and to challenge ablest views about how everyday activities must be performed.

One question which comes to mind when watching this film is what is reality and what is fantasy? In the beginning the young girl wakes up to find adults picnicking around her. They ignore her and she goes back to sleep. As the girl sleeps the viewer witnesses the adults becoming more uninhibited in their behaviour and having more fun. It is possible the girl is dreaming this scene of the adults' changing behaviour, since we see her fall back asleep and the camera remains low within her viewing perspective. The adults then too begin to fall asleep, strewn about the abandoned building. The girl awakes again, and as the adults sleep she ascends the stairs. To her surprise she meets the adults who are now accepting of her. Because the adults remain sleeping as she climbs the stairs the viewer must ask whether it is reality that they are being shown or, are they witnessing a child's ability to engage in make-belief, which would indicate that she is acting out her desire to be accepted by those around her?

The film, being rather ambiguous can be read from a different perspective. As the adults fall asleep (described above) the camera switches to close up jump cuts, giving the impression of a series of photographic snapshots. This style of cinematography provides a suggestion of reality. So perhaps the reality is that the adults are sleeping and the viewer is being shown the adults' dreams all along. The adults are perhaps dreaming of a time when they felt left out, and they see themselves as a young girl, because being a child she may evoke feelings of vulnerability. After this photographic sequence of the adults sleeping, the young girl awakes again and climbs the stairs. She then joins in with the adults who now happily include her in their festivities. If the viewer is seeing the adults' dreams, this
could be interpreted as the dream progressing to a more accepting world with the girl being a representation of this realisation. I am not going to suggest that one particular reading is correct as the film is designed to be ambiguous and therefore allow for multiple readings.

The film *Picnic* destabilises binary categories of reality/fantasy, childhood/adulthood, disabled/nondisabled. For instance, the adults become more childlike as the film progresses, and it becomes difficult to make a judgement as to whether the adults are dreaming of childhood or the child is dreaming of adulthood. It appears that in this film there was a conscious effort to challenge dualistic thinking, instead promoting unstable categories rather than the “othering” of the disabled person. There is another link between the theme of childhood, disability and fantasy. One of the many misrepresentations of disability is the portrayal of disabled people as being childlike.¹⁹⁷ The film links disability and childhood in with the images of fantasy to demonstrate the idea that “disabled people are childlike” is nothing more than a fairytale or a myth.

The multiple layers and ambiguity of the film provide the viewer with many different narratives. As Küppers points out, the use of multiple layers in performance can make it difficult to attach any 'common' narrative of disability to the performance.¹⁹⁸ The symbolism, movement and cinematography of the film progresses from a view of the world that is confined and restricted to a world where all people are free and empowered. Moreover, the anti-dualistic nature of the film demonstrates a more universal view of disability by intertwining fantasy/reality and childhood/adulthood. The emphasis on diversity rather than dualism and the improvised movements perhaps encourage an active viewing position (active witness and immersion). It is difficult to make comparisons between the dancers and hold onto any classic aesthetics because each dancer can be seen to use their individual physicalities to explore the movement possibilities within the landscapes of the film.

Touch Compass’s commitment to improvisation and contact improvisation both as a choreographic tool and for performance results in dancers exploring their own unique

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¹⁹⁸ Küppers 2003, 60-61.
range of movement and creating new ways of moving rather than adhering to classic aesthetics. This generally encourages active viewing positions from audience members, but does not necessarily mean that all members are going to take up such positions. In *This Word Love* and *Lighthouse* there were moments where the choreography promotes distinctions and comparisons between the disabled and nondisabled dancers, but *Picnic* certainly does not adhere to 'classic' aesthetics and no one style of movement or bodily form stood out as the 'ideal'. It appears that as Touch Compass has grown more experienced as a company the themes and narratives have become more thoughtful and complex. The company does often bring in outside professionals, such as choreographers and directors, so their previous experience and knowledge of disability obviously influences the outcomes of the work. Importantly, the chronological analysis of the above performances demonstrates an increasing awareness of the representation of disability within dance and a move toward multi-layered narratives. This includes attempts to show the transparency of boundaries surrounding categories that might be assumed to be fixed or stable, as shown in *Picnic*, and this tendency seems to be continued in their latest work *Harmonious Oddity* (2008). The company too seem to be taking greater risks in their efforts to dispel myths of disability, such as the belief that people with disabilities are asexual. Works such as *Lighthouse*, *Lusi’s Eden* and *Harmonious Oddity* show disabled performers as being physically attracted to other people and themselves as being sexually desirable. Touch Compass has firmly established itself as a leader of integrated dance in New Zealand providing both professional performance opportunities and training to disabled dancers.
CONCLUSION

The fact that there are professional integrated dance companies within the mainstream concert dance arena demonstrates desire from some to challenge the hierarchical and exclusive foundations on which this dance tradition was built. Integrated dance has the power to challenge classic aesthetics which idealises specific dancing bodies and movement through creating new and inclusive aesthetics. Contact improvisation is perhaps one form of movement that has the potential to do this as it promotes reciprocal interactions between dancers and deters comparison through an emphasis on the ongoing flow of movement rather than the 'correct' execution of particular shapes. Companies need to ensure that they do not reinforce common negative cultural representations and constructions of disabilities within their choreography. My discussion has shown, this could be achieved through different types of performance strategies, such as considering the framing of a work, the use of multiple layers of narratives, emphasising the viewer's gaze and expectations within a social encounter. Other tactics might include shock tactics or exaggerating one's (dis)ability. It is important to be aware of how disability can be read within a choreography in order to avoid reproducing ablest aesthetics and reinforcing ablest beliefs.

People with disabilities have come a long way from being viewed as inferior, deviant and dependent on the state for survival, to the disability pride festivals of today.\(^\text{199}\) It appears New Zealand society is beginning to step into Beatson's fourth phase of identity and self-governance. These changes in conjunction with the ideals developed during the post modern era of western contemporary dance have opened up the world of dance performance to a wider range of dancers. Although integrated dance did not make its debut in New Zealand until the late 1990's, Touch Compass Dance Trust and now Jolt, have established training and performance opportunities for disabled dancers. In terms of Beatson's fourth stage it will be interesting to see if

professional dance groups begin to emerge that are founded and run by artistic
directors, choreographers and dancers with disabilities. Moreover, will there be a time
when 'mainstream' companies begin to employ dancers with disabilities? This would
increase the variety of performance opportunities beyond Touch Compass and Jolt,
as these two companies are obviously limited in the number of dancers they can
employ at any one time. The accessibility of New Zealand tertiary dance programmes
is also now a consideration and a possible area of research.

Sarah Whatley researched UK tertiary institutions that offer dance programmes. She
found that many teachers admitted they lacked knowledge and expertise on how to
effectively include students with disabilities.200 There were some differences found
between students with and without disabilities in the preferred class structure. For
instance disabled students preferred a more unstructured approach to movement
work, with an emphasis on imagery and less on repetition, while nondisabled
students preferred a structured technique class.201 In applying this kind of research
within the New Zealand context, it would establish data such as: the accessibility of
tertiary institutions for dance students with disabilities, the level of skills teachers
have to teach in an integrated environment, the range of professional development
opportunities available for teachers, the learning and teaching strategies that are
most effective in integrated classes, and performance opportunities available for
disabled dance students once they graduate. The embodied experiences is another
interesting area of research. The information collected for my thesis was primarily
from television documentaries and therefore dependent on the type of questions
asked and the editing process. Some further areas of research from my analysis of
the dancer's embodied experiences might include an exploration into the anxieties
and fears experienced by nondisabled and disabled dancers, training concerns for
disabled dancers, and any existing prejudices in mainstream contemporary dance.

Not all people would read the three Touch Compass performances in the same way
that I did. I have had the luxury of watching these performances multiple times.
Additionally I have read literature on the genre of integrated dance and have had
dance training and performance experience over many years, including some

200 Whatley 2007, 4.
201 Ibid, 4-5.
experience in dancing with disabled performers. Therefore it is important to
acknowledge that there are many positions from which to view integrated dance
performance, which is influenced by an audience member’s knowledge of and
attitudes towards integrated dance performance as well as performance aspects. In
saying this, my analysis demonstrated how Touch Compass has become increasingly
wise with age as their choreographies show more complexity and consideration for
the representation of disability on stage. The training and choreographic process of
utilising improvisation, contact improvisation and collaboration allow all dancers to
explore, extend and share their own unique movement style, which is often reflected
on stage through a rejection of one 'ideal' dancing body.

I believe that integrated dance offers the next progression in the western
contemporary dance tradition of challenging and developing upon previous dance
styles. As more disabled dancers enter the New Zealand dance network, audiences
will witness the fourth stage of self-governance. This will be achieved through the
emergence of successful dance artists with disabilities, such as freelance
choreographers and dance collectives.
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