A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND DISFIGUREMENT IN BALLET

By

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ABSTRACT

Bodily difference has long been a social and cultural target of dominant ideologies. Misconceptions and myths regarding beauty, aesthetics and physical, cognitive, emotional and creative capabilities are in part responsible for this separation between the so-called *normal/typical* and *abnormal/atypical* body. While various contexts of difference exist and contribute to the marginalisation of many people, the disfigured and disabled body lies on the very margins of the self-other, ab/normal binaries. Ballet has been linked with countless harmful beliefs – such as intolerant and elitist principles, unattainable beauty standards and physical, cognitive and emotional health problems. Ballet therefore surfaces as another subject that predominantly receives criticism and condemnation in the academic world. Aiming to address and challenge these views, this dissertation seeks to consider three subjects – namely, disfigurement, disability and ballet – within a framework that relies on the notion of multidimensionality. This notion refers to both ballet and the body's existence and significance beyond a merely visual, tangible and physical dimension. The intention of this study is to free these subjects from the discriminating, excluding and stigmatising ideologies that govern perspectives, understandings, interpretations and representations of them. Contesting popular ideological understandings of body and ballet, Michaela DePrince and Joe Powell-Main, two of many ballet dancers that have been labelled as disfigured and/or disabled, serve as commendable examples of the establishment 1) of a counter-narrative for those bodies that are excluded, stigmatised and marginalised, and 2) of the positive aspects and impact of ballet. Freefall Dance Company is a well-known integrated ballet organisation that celebrates the talent and identities of dancers with cognitive disabilities. By focusing on the personal experiences of these two dancers as well as the art of ballet, stripped from its ideological conventions and thus considered purely for its effects as an art form – as in Freefall Dance Company – I wish to formulate a multidimensional understanding and interpretation of body and dance. A multidimensional perspective in particular on disfigurement, disability and ballet paves a possible path towards restoring these subjects on a physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual level. Such a perspective on body and ballet allows individuals such as DePrince, Powell-Main and the Freefall dancers, who have been excluded, marginalised and stigmatised by dominant social belief systems,

to freely engage in the art of dance and benefit from a multidimensional relationship with and experience of ballet. Furthermore, by demonstrating the benefits and restorative potential of this relationship and experience for the body through ballet, the art of ballet itself can also be restored.

Keywords: disfigurement, disability, ballet, social inclusion, destigmatisation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Seemingly much more than any other art form, ballet constantly receives extensive criticism (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou 2012:107). Alexandra Kolb and Sophia Kalogeropoulou (2012:107) make use of the term "ballet bashing" to explain the stigmas and accusations thrown at the art form, including harmful impact on one's physical and psychological state, ballet's (assumed) highly exclusive organisation as well as its strict methods of teaching and training. "Ballet bashers", according to Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012:108), emphasise negative rather than positive attributes of ballet through a firm reliance on popular assumptions about the art form – for instance, ballet's emphasis of an ideal body that degrades and objectifies women, and forces them "to fit into stereotypical patriarchal roles" as well as "accept their oppression in a way wholly inconsistent with emancipatory objectives".

Scholars such as Judith Hanna (1995), Marianne Clark (2018), Imogen Aujla and Emma Redding (2013; 2014; 2021) and Kolb and Kalogeropoulou themselves (2012) are among those who defend the art of ballet against a largely disapproving perspective thereof. In validating many of my key arguments, I refer to such scholars throughout this dissertation.

Examples of themes that have emerged from discussions on ballet's elitist and exclusive organisation are (expectations of) stereotypical feminine qualities, a narrow-minded perspective on aesthetics and what the typical ballet body should look like – this includes assumptions regarding race, gender, size/shape, physical ability and other qualities. Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012:119), however, challenge these ideas that are seemingly inevitably attached to ballet, pointing to opportunities for empowerment in ballet. They take the female dancer as example. Stereotypical feminine qualities – fragility, passivity, inferiority to the opposite sex – are contrasted with "non-typical attributes of femininity, such as strength, toughness, resilience, and the testing of one's limits, within an almost exclusively female environment" (that is, when considering the dancer 's experience as opposed to the character portrayed *by* the dancer on stage) (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou

2012:119). It is worth noting that "[t]he stimulation of the rational mind … does not exclude emotional expression through ballet" (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou 2012:119).

The stigmatisation of ballet takes many forms and angles, but they all typically share one common implication: one can or should not positively experience the implementation of ballet (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou 2012:111). Here, Kolb & Kalogeropoulou (2012) are particularly concerned with the notion of pleasure. It is widely believed that engagement with ballet (in particular the practice thereof) can and/or should not be enjoyed. This is due to an emphasis on the assumptions, stereotypes and myths about ballet both in an academic and social context. I unpack these themes in ensuing chapters. Stiefel (in Dance Magazine 2007) denies ballet's assumed hierarchy and its dancers' subsequent oppression, asserting that "[s]acrifice and professionalism should not be confused with oppression and lack of individuality**".** Nevertheless**,** based on the infinite accounts of finger pointing toward ballet, such "defences of ballet are disproportionately under-represented in comparison with its criticism" (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou 2012:112). Accordingly, Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012:113-115) suggest and encourage alternative approaches to interpreting and understanding ballet. I wish to expand on their suggestion by exploring how ballet includes individuals with disfigurement and disabilities and, in doing so, has the potential to be an inclusive method of art that produces creativity and expression, as well as destigmatises these individuals.

Ballet is often tied to structural violence, which is the collective term for the "social systems as well as the mechanisms through which they produce and [normalise] marginalization, exclusion, and exploitation" (Salt 2024:52). It is the intentional and normalised product of unequal power dynamics (Salt 2024:53-54). While it can certainly be argued that structural violence exists in the ballet world – racial myths, aesthetic and beauty expectations, elitist ideologies – I wish to distinguish between the organisation of ballet and the art of ballet in itself. The former may be associated with social, cultural and political issues. However, I wish to consider the latter as separate from these issues. Systems and people in power, attempting to maintain the status quo, bring about structural violence (Salt 2024:144). This should not imply that ballet, removed from a given

circumstance and considered purely as an art form, brings about structural violence. Rather, it is the circumstance in which it is placed, that is to be blamed for such matters. Kate Mattingly (2021:184) criticises the "assumptions about ballet", rather than ballet itself, for generating harmful perspectives on the art form and those who engage with it. In agreement, Jennifer Fisher (2019:23) claims that ballet is not capable *in itself* of determining its absorption and interpretation.

Hanna (1995:328) explores the ways in which ballet is capable of having a political demeanour, and can thus produce – at least, inspire – social transformation in society. Hanna (1995:330) argues that dance could and should be considered in its potential effective contribution to the fields of study that aim to improve the perceptions and living standards of those who remain oppressed and stigmatised due to difference. Building on the limited work of scholars that are careful not to condemn the value and potential(s) of dance, such as Hanna (1995:323), I wish to establish a potential link that ties ballet to social inclusion and empowerment. I believe that her approach to dance can be effectively applied in this study – firstly to destigmatise and restore the ideas around ballet, and subsequently to employ it as a valuable channel for destigmatising, including and empowering othered individuals.

I make use of the concept of multidimensionality as the fundamental basis on which to interpret the body in dance. The term *multidimensional* relates to ideas of complexity and multiplicity. Kenneth Law, Chi-Sum Wong and William Mobley (1998:741) define a multidimensional construct as comprising "a number of interrelated attributes or dimensions [that] exists in multidimensional domains". The conceptualisation of such a construct occurs under a total or generalised abstraction that holds meaning and significance, and that stands for or represents its dimensions (Law, Wong & Mobley 1998:741). In order to enrich, rather than constrain, our understanding of a multidimensional construct, it is crucial to understand that the dimensions of the construct be defined and specified. Without such description and specification, it is impossible to understand dimensions as connected to a total construct and to derive this total construct from those dimensions (Law, Wong & Mobley 1998:741). Understanding the body as multidimensional therefore involves an understanding of each of its dimensions and, in

turn, an understanding of the body as representing, as a whole, all of these dimensions. This dissertation applies the same approach to ballet, arguing that a number of dimensions collectively shape dance and, conversely, dance represents all of these dimensions as a total construct. In order to provide context for my use of the term, I discuss the concept of multidimensionality from the perspectives of a number of scholars.

Richard Ashmore, Kay Deaux and Trace McLaughlin-Volpe (2004:82) believe "that collective identity is a multidimensional concept". They speak of collective identity as comprising "cognitive beliefs", "emotional significance" and "behavioural implications" (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe 2004:82). Although Ashmore *et al* (2004:109) are concerned with a *single* identity (within a group), they recognise the *multiplicity* of identity and declare that individuals commonly "acknowledge a set of identities … that converge and combine in various ways". In other words, a collective identity can be seen as the total representation of numerous identities. Furthermore, while Ashmore *et al* (2004) regard the notion of multidimensionality with respect to a collective identity (a group: persons with disfigurement and/or disability), this dissertation regards this same notion also with respect to an individual identity (a person with disfigurement and/or disability). The work of Seymour Rosenberg (1997) also considers the body as a complex, multi-layered entity. In arguing this, she makes reference to William James, who states that the "empirical self [consists] of the material self, social self, and spiritual self" (James in Rosenberg 1997:23). To acknowledge the body or the self as simultaneously material, social and spiritual, is to acknowledge the body as having multiple dimensions. James Mark Baldwin (in Rosenberg 1997:23) expanded on these ideas of the self, classifying two interconnected features of the social self. The first of these, called "ego", is associated with a self-view and self-perception. The second, "alter", is associated with one's thoughts of and consciousness regarding others. Ego and alter, respectively and collectively, exemplify two parts of the body. Subsequently, with regards to the social self the body can be seen as having two separate, but connected dimensions (Rosenberg 1997:23).

I build on theories put forth by these scholars, in order to construct what I refer to, both respectively and in connection to one another, as the multidimensionality of the body and

the multidimensionality of ballet. I argue that this concept is capable of opening up as well as progressing practices, endeavours and fields of study that intend to destigmatise, include and empower individuals with bodily difference. This dissertation is focused on disfigurement and disability as examples of unavoidable and inevitable bodily difference. The work of Hanna (1994) and Gudrun Grabher (2016), based on Emmanuel Levinas (1969), respectively and collectively shape this dissertation's multidimensional perspective on ballet and the body. I further consider and explore the theme of multidimensionality from these two scholars' theories in Chapter Two.

This study will also incorporate a similar approach to that of Deirdre Sklar (1991), who takes an ethnographic stance towards the practice of dance. She explains dance as the cultural knowledge embodied within bodily movement (Sklar 1991:6). Such movement is stylised and codified, perhaps more so in ballet than in other genres of dance. Sklar (1991:6) notes that this knowledge moves beyond somatics. *Somatic* relates to the body as "experienced and regulated from within" (Lester 2017:31). Thus, says Kerry Ferris Lester (2017:32), somatic experiences relate to self-awareness, yet ought not to be simplified as such. Lester (2017:32) explains that these complex processes involve a non-judgemental observation of self in the present time, after which self-reflective consideration takes place. This may occur physically, within the nervous system or mentally. Somatic consideration of body and dance implies that movement experiences are observed and reflected upon (Lester 2017:32). According to Isabelle Ginot (2010:13), somatics considers the "physical sensation" and "fundamentally unique experience" of each individual. While personal experience is of the essence, the focus of somatics is on the physicality of the body and does not regard the complete (or multi) dimensionality of the body. Critically, Ginot (2010:26) calls into question understandings of the human body that is to be produced by a somatic discourse. In order to overcome the ideology that has already attached itself to somatic thinking, the human body, she argues, must be understood as conscious and unconscious, active and capable of resistance, flexible yet resolute (Ginot 2010:26). I believe that the human body can be perceived and interpreted through the acknowledgement of its multidimensionality.

1.2 Aims & Objectives

I argue that the art of ballet can aid in the socio-cultural restoration and destigmatisation of individuals who are rejected, excluded and as such withdrawn from society. Furthermore, this study considers performance – through its elements of stage and character, as well as the elusive, immersive and expressive characteristics of ballet – as an empowering and liberating aspect of ballet. Ballet, to this end, can be restorative, inclusive, culturally constructive, and highly valuable in potentially freeing disabled and disfigured individuals from discrimination and stigmatisation.

It is this study's intention to address the following research questions:

- What is the importance and inclusive potential of a multidimensional perspective on 1) the disabled or disfigured body and 2) the art of ballet within the fields of performing arts and visual culture?
- How can a multidimensional perspective on body and dance, specifically ballet, challenge and change dominant representations and understandings of persons with disfigurement, physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities?
- How can ballet, through this multidimensional perspective, be reimagined as an inclusive method of art that produces creativity and expression and, more importantly, facilitates social inclusion and destigmatisation of persons with disfigurement, physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities?

In order to address the above questions, I will explore ballet dancers who are persons with disfigurement and/or disabilities as well as a ballet company that includes and empowers such individuals. These three examples, respectively, consider 1) the disfigured body, 2) the physically disabled body and 3) the cognitively disabled body, in dance. To elucidate further:

- I will consider *the dancer*, thus regarding the body, by exploring the lives of two individuals, each of whose life story tells a moving tale about their relationship(s) with their disfigurement or disability and with dance. These two individuals are: 1) Michaela DePrince, currently a senior soloist (professional dancer) with Boston Ballet and 2) Joe Powell-Main, currently a dancer with Ballet Cymru in Newport, United Kingdom. DePrince suffers from vitiligo, a condition affecting the

pigmentation of the skin on her neck, chest and back. DePrince, therefore, serves as an example of a dancer with disfigurement. Powell-Main was a highly gifted student of the Royal Ballet School until he lost the functioning of his left leg after several injuries and a motor accident. Powell-Main therefore serves as an example of a dancer with physical disability. In my analyses, I wish to focus on the personal experience(s) of these individuals within the world of ballet largely by making use of secondary sources.

- My analysis will then turn to *the dance*, regarding the organisation of ballet, by exploring a company that is deliberately and positively associated with the inclusion, education and empowerment of persons with disabilities. The example I consider, award-winning Freefall Dance Company that celebrates dancers with cognitive disabilities, serves as an example of cognitive disability in ballet. Once again, much of my analyses, collectively structured as a literature study, rely on secondary sources.

These examples will be analysed as three case studies. Upon my search for the most relevant and significant case studies, it came to my attention that there is no freely available visual material in South Africa specifically representing disability and disfigurement in ballet. The idea of connecting ballet to disability and disfigurement has not yet been explored in South Africa, both in the public and academic sphere. I therefore refer to international dancers[1] and companies in my case studies. It must be acknowledged that there has been noteworthy engagement with disability and disfigurement in dance in South Africa. However, such cases are not linked specifically with the genre of ballet, which is a key subject of this dissertation. Furthermore, it must be recognised that many dance styles overlap with and borrow from ballet, which renders the visual material in Chapters Three and Four open to interpretation. Nevertheless, for the purposes of my key arguments, I view all three my case studies as identifying with ballet. I expand on my

[1] Both the dancers analysed in Chapter Three are young adults and well-known personalities on social media. They actively produce work that challenges preconceived ideas about ballet, disfigurement and disability. Subsequently, there is much (freely) available visual material on these individuals, which allows me to conduct a thorough case study on each.

choice of genre, as well as other similar genres, and South Africa's position in the field of inclusive dance in Chapter Two.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

I rely on two primary disciplines on which to build my research, which both take the body as subject, and bring together critical perspectives on dance, aesthetics and the significance of dimensions that transcend the visual and the physical. These two disciplines, dance ethnography and somaesthetics, are briefly discussed below. Both will aid in forming the lens through which I will conduct my research, analyses and criticism. Additional relevant fields, among others, include cultural studies, socio-cultural anthropology and critical sociology. Such fields underlie as well as influence the multi/interdisciplinary theoretical framework which I employ in my study.

1.3.1 Dance Ethnography

Dance ethnography focuses on the dance, as opposed to the social group that shapes it. In researching dance, dance ethnography theorists recognise differences in orientation and perception. Relating to the methodological approach to my study, dance ethnography also considers relationships between past and present (Edwards 2001:491). This framework acknowledges the care and depth integral to a meaningful analysis, from a cultural perspective, of disfigurement and disability among ballet dancers and within the world of ballet. Dance ethnography positions academics and theorists in the same space as dance itself. Through engaging with three case studies, I occupy and wish to position the reader within this space both hermeneutically and semiotically (both methodologies to be discussed in this Chapter). As a dancer and ballet teacher myself, I rely on my knowledge of and experience in sharing the space (the perspective and experience) of the performer in my analyses. I intend to place the viewer in the performance space in a literal manner, for example, by viewing the performance from the stage, or from behind and around the performer – thereby collapsing the traditional boundary between stage and audience. I also attempt to achieve this sharing of space in a non-literal manner, for example, by encouraging the viewer to understand and relate with the performer's own experience. I expand on this process in following Chapters. As noted, dance ethnography can be distinguished from other ethnographic perspectives in that it is embedded in the body and

bodily experience – as opposed to writing, thoughts or objects (Sklar 1991:6). An ethnographic study of any dance form opens up a broader perspective that includes not merely the dance, but the event – moreover, it also includes the entire cultural process within that event. Situating this subject within the framework of human behaviour and as such considering deeper meanings that are so often either presumed or neglected, dance ethnography extends our definitions of ballet (Sklar 1991:8). Sklar (1991:8-9) believes that kinaesthetic empathy[2] towards movement is essential in order to understand "the experience and meaning of dancing". Commenting on the political and cultural potential of dance, James Clifford (in Sklar 1991:9) says: "as readers and writers of ethnographies, we struggle to confront and take responsibility for our systematic constructions of others and of ourselves through others". Addressing this issue, dance ethnography allows for – or rather insists upon – the comprehension and deciphering of ballet from the perspective of the dancer, which calls for ethical exploration of the subject in scholarly writing (Sklar 1991:9). This can be seen as a respectful request for fair investigation and critique of ballet.

Importantly, as Sklar (2000:70) demonstrates in a reinterpretation of her original conceptualisation of the framework, by including felt kinetic knowledge within an ethnographical study on dance, it is possible "to address the cultural meanings inherent in movement". Such an approach, as shown in the examples of Sklar's 2000 article, relies on personal experience. Moreover, movement is regarded "as emergent, felt experience that" is both conceptual and metaphorical within the context of social meaning. Especially relevant to my areas of research, this view extends both to the somatic and symbolic areas of dance – which I explain through and align with multidimensionality. Ethnography compels us to submit our preconceptions and immerse ourselves in a specific cultural

[2] Kinaesthetic empathy can be seen as "a moment of conceptual coming together … both produced by and representative of a particular cultural and scientific moment" (Reynolds & Reason 2012:17). Dee Reynolds & Matthew Reason (2012:18) position this interdisciplinary concept as essential in grasping social interaction and communication within art and culture. Originating in the broader field of aesthetics and visual arts, the concept has grown to become particularly important in dance and movement as it outlines the performer-spectator relationship (Reynolds & Reason 2012:19). The term relates to the viewer's "muscular and emotional responses to watching dancers" (Martin in Reynolds & Reason 2012:19). This does not merely penetrate the physical dimension of body and dance, but moreover allows audiences to directly access and experience the dancer's feelings (Reynolds & Reason 2012:19). Kinaesthetic empathy, although perhaps too broadly and universally defined by Martin (in Reynolds & Reason 2012:20), is a "negotiation across differences" and a respect for otherness.

milieu. Context is therefore a crucial aspect of ethnography, allowing for a perspective from the inside (self) rather than the outside (other) (Frosch 1999:258). Accordingly, as I intend to achieve in this dissertation. an ethnographic approach to the subject of dance requires the academic or theorist to occupy the same space as dance itself (Sklar 1991:8). Sklar (1991:6) openly acknowledges and includes any movement within ethnological research, taking care not to set any limitations for exploration. This assertion supports an inclusive and progressive perspective on ballet. Also central to my analyses, dance ethnography recognises the body, the individual, in dance while at the same time absorbing the "researcher in a humanising process that dissolves the blinders of parochialism" (Sklar 1991:9). In order to address the research questions of this dissertation, I consider and attempt to breakdown the self-other dichotomy through an ethnographic approach. Refusing a classification in the field of cultural studies that deems it a "study of objectifiable 'other' cultures", dance ethnography breaks down the boundary between self and other (Frosch 1999:256).

1.3.2 Somaesthetics

Somaesthetics, according to Richard Shusterman (2012:17), the philosopher who coined the term, transcends the field of aesthetics. The somaesthetic model therefore centres on the body as a crucial living and perceptual instrument of observation and interpretation. Shusterman's intention, says Ginot (2010:19), was to connect and apply somatics to philosophy. Importantly, Shusterman illustrates the embeddedness of philosophical constructions within bodily experience (Ginot 2010:19). Somaesthetics lays bare the fundamental issues regarding such observation, "consciousness [and] feeling … embodied in the root meaning of [aesthetics]" – deriving from the concept of aisthesis (Shusterman 2012:3).

Aisthesis comprises total sensorial perception, experience and subsequent knowledge (Verrips 2005:30). It therefore obliges a consideration of all corporeal sensorial sensations, as opposed to a focus merely on the visual (Verrips 2005:31). Aisthesis extends beyond visual perception, incorporating "all the senses, as well as the impression that the perceived leaves on the body" (Verrips 2005:30). While Alexander Baumgarten is credited for coining the term *aesthetics* and is thus known as the "father of modern

aesthetics", his work received much criticism over the centuries – and rightfully so (Wessell 1972:334). Leonard Wessell (1972:334) argues that Baumgarten's intention to "liberate aesthetic theory from the confines of rationalistic intellectualism" fell short in its preference for conceptual or intellectual knowledge. Subsequently, through Baumgarten's work, aesthetic experience is reduced to this kind of knowledge. Intellectual thought is thus seen as superior, whereas perception is seen as inferior. This approach prevents "any autonomy for the field of aesthetics" (Wessell 1972: 335). Later, Kantian philosophy[3] condensed the notion to consider only "an eye that observes, without a body" (Bleeker *et al* in Verrips 2005:30). Kant's focus on the concept of judgement and taste also proves insufficient in its reliance on cognition. While the judgement of taste is grounded in pleasure, it also claims to be universally communicable. However, Donald Crawford (1965:59) argues that "a pleasure can be universally communicable only if it is based not on mere sensation but rather on a state of mind that is universally communicable". Crawford continues (1965:59), claiming that such states of mind are always cognitive, meaning that the pleasure found in beauty "must be based on cognition". Founding judgement of taste on formal properties, Kant denies "the pleasures of charm or emotion" or "empirical sensations" (Crawford 1965:59). A focus on somatic experience or, more specifically, according to Jojada Verrips (2005:31), a re-use of the concept of aesthesis, is fundamental to an understanding of felt emotion and non-rational thinking. Shusterman's (2012:3) framework favours a view on philosophy as an embodied way(s) of living as opposed to a purely abstract and theoretical view. This embodiment central to philosophy extends beyond theories of the body in relation to perceptions, actions or thoughts – such philosophy is demonstrated through the body itself, expressed by way(s) of living (Shusterman 2012:4). In other words, this is the process of putting the body where the mouth is, or walking the walk as opposed to merely talking the talk (Shusterman 2012:4).

[3] Kant, father of modern philosophical aesthetics, intended "to resolve classicism and impressionism, objectivism and subjectivism" (Crawford 1965:1). Kantian epistemology investigates "how a certain kind of [judgement] is made" (Callanan 2019:26). Kant set out to distinguish between the judgement of beauty and the judgement of goodness, pleasantness and/or usefulness. The former, believed to be a unique experience, is referred to as judgement(s) of taste (Crawford 1965:2).

Alex Ciorogar (2017:51) points to the determination of somaesthetics to supplant philosophical perspectives of classical arts and aesthetics that are "idealistic, essentialist, metaphysical". Accordingly, the framework argues for "a conscious reflection on and of the body" in considering arts and aesthetics (Ciorogar 2017:51). Relying on self-expression, self-shaping and self-fulfilment, Shusterman places the soma at the very core of critical understanding (Ciorogar 2017:52). Furthermore, and relevant to this dissertation's focus on body and ballet, somaesthetics proposes the body simultaneously as the cradle as well as the recipient of all artistic practices (Ciorogar 2017:52).

This view proves to be an effective framework for my study as it extends beyond the display of aesthetic qualities, underscoring the perception *and* experience of such qualities (Shusterman 2012:6). Somaesthetics – being an open-ended framework, encompassing the many different theories and disciplines that deal "with bodily perception, performance, and presentation" – is therefore important to employ in my research (Shusterman 2012:12). A final, yet no less significant, component of somaesthetics is the fact that the framework does not favour body over language, nor the other way around. Somaesthetics treats both body and language equally in its consideration of the soma as interpreted through perception, performance and self-shaping (Shusterman 2012:121-142). In order to understand, says Shusterman, one needs to go beyond interpretation. As such, there is an emphasis on the agency of the self as sentient and embodied (Budziak 2017:3). Anna Budziak (2017:3) points out that, within a somaesthetic framework, the self must be "restored to its somatic dimension, rather than only re-storied". This statement demands the restoration of the embodied self. I also keenly apply the terms "*restored*" and "re-*storied*" to my own analyses of two dancers and a ballet company that, together, represent disfigurement, physical disability and cognitive disability in unique and powerful ways. I do so hoping to strengthen this dissertation's objective of restoring body and ballet. The restoration of an individual implicates all dimensions, not merely that which is visual or tangible. Here, Shusterman's preference for the term *soma* as opposed to *body* is significant in its consideration of a "living, feeling, sentient, purposive body" as opposed to "a mere physical corpus of flesh and bones" (Anderson 2021:124). This idea directly points to and recognises the

significance of a multidimensional consideration of the body in an endeavour to restore persons with disfigurement and disability.

1.3.3 Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory can be understood as a particular theoretical approach in the field of disability studies. The theory stems from critical theory, meaning that it is "'simultaneously' explanatory, practical and normative" (Horkheimer in Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:3). Melinda Hall (2019:1) explains critical disability theory as "a diverse, interdisciplinary set of theoretical approaches". The theory analyses the concept of "disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social and political phenomenon" (Hall 2019:1). It is set out to explain the problems and obstacles of society, "identify the actors that can change" these issues, and present standards for social debates with the purpose of formulating accessible targets of social change (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:7).

Critical disability studies call into question the traditional means by which "normative" groups have considered the topic of disability (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:7). It addresses the biased, unjust and oppressive treatment of those with disabilities by those who are able-bodied. This treatment is the result of restrictions placed on people with disabilities (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:3). The theory criticises traditional binaries – such as disability/ability, self/other, normal/abnormal. Moreover, it underscores the need for context in order to thoroughly understand a particular disability or impairment (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:8). Breaking down ableist ideology and the barriers it poses to persons with disabilities is a primary objective of critical disability theory (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:8). Critical disability theory subsequently disapproves of traditional assumptions and discussions on disability that are oppressive and harmful to individuals with disabilities. Importantly, this theory asserts that disability is not exclusively a medical or social matter, but instead "a question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to" (Devlin & Pothier in Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:3). Critical disability theory can therefore be seen as a form of activism and is not confined by the academic field. It addresses dominant ideologies that stigmatise individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities, inside and outside of scholastic milieus (Hall 2019:1).

Significant to the intentions of this dissertation, critical disability theory, according to Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz (2017:4), regards the notion of multidimensionality. David Hosking (in Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:4) sees this notion as integral to the framework of critical disability theory because it escapes the exclusionary and conformist consequences that arise from public policies and it underscores "the fact that people with disabilities differ … [shaping] a diverse and variable population". Importantly, this population is not bound by elements such as ethnicity, class or gender, and is also present within all of these categorisations. Hosking (in Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:4) asserts that, with regards to this disability population, the idea of intersectionality has been replaced by multidimensionality. In alignment with my use of the term, Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz (2017:4) points out that the recognition of an individual's multidimensionality, and in turn the recognition of a group consisting of multidimensional individuals, "allows for a structural analysis of a society".

In correspondence with the approach of this dissertation, critical disability theory takes into account and critically considers the "lived experiences and … circumstances under which oppressed subjects live" (Hall 2019:2). Critical disability theory is therefore a means of endorsing and amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities. Hosking (in Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:6) emphasises the importance of these voices, arguing that an able-bodied person cannot comprehend the experience of disability. It is thus crucial that the perspective and experience of individuals with disabilities are heard and appreciated, otherwise an accurate understanding of disability is not possible. The consequences of failure to realise this is a dangerous misunderstanding of disability as negative, associated with pain and suffering, dependence, worthlessness, and misery (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:6). In short, critical disability theory intends to change and challenge social systems and, subsequently, achieve liberation, empowerment and equality for those with disabilities. It offers "a theoretical basis for differentiating disability policies – policies that take inclusion, equality and autonomy of people with disabilities into account" (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:7). While the theory is situated within the field of disability studies, it is at the same time critical of the field, exposing its various shortcomings. One such example is the fact that disability studies are

concerned mainly with "the white, western middle class" (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:7). Another example is the "assumption that Western disability theories and academic discourses are transferrable world-wide without modification" (Goodley in Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2017:7).

While critical disability theory, like numerous other theories, themes and concepts applied in this dissertation, is concerned with the topic of disability, I nevertheless apply the theory both to the disabled body and the disfigured body. Without equating disability with disfigurement, I argue that there are many similarities in the treatment, representation, understanding and experience of individuals who are either disabled, disfigured, or both. Crucial for the restorative and transformative goals I have set out for the disfigured and disabled practitioner of ballet, somaesthetics, dance ethnography and critical disability theory all focus on embodiment and emphasise the body in its perception, experience and reality. These frameworks support, whether intentionally or spontaneously, a multidimensional perspective on the body, which is a central theme of this dissertation.

1.4 Research Methodology

Semiotics and hermeneutics are both central methodologies that will be employed in conducting my analyses of body – specifically the (physically) disabled or disfigured dancing body, represented respectively by two subjects – and of ballet – specifically a ballet company that celebrates a talented team of dancers with cognitive disabilities. These analyses, conducted in Chapters Three and Four, will each be separated into two sections. A hermeneutic analysis, producing a textual and theoretic investigation will be followed by a semiotic analysis, examining a selection of visual material.

1.4.1 Semiotics

Semiotics can very shortly be defined as "the study of signs" (Chandler 2007:1). Umberto Eco (in Chandler 2007:1) offers a more in-depth, but very broad, definition of the term, stating that it "is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign". It therefore encompasses "anything that stands for something else" (Chandler 2007:1). A contemporary understanding of semiotics stems from two philosophers, namely

Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. To the former philosopher, the term 'semiology' referred to the study of the roles that signs play in society. The latter philosopher made use of the term semeiotic/semiotic to refer to "the formal doctrine of signs" – relating to logic (Chandler 2007:3). Together, de Saussure and Peirce co-founded what is today broadly known as *semiotics*. Linguistics is essential to the methodology of semiotics. Supported by a number of other theorists, de Saussure described language as the most essential among the many systems of signs (Chandler 2007:5). Semiotics, like hermeneutics, has over time developed its own different forms. Gradually, a shift took place from structuralist semiotics to social semiotics – the former having been rejected due to its inflexibility (Chandler 2007:9).

Structural semiotics is concerned with the ways in which the governing rules of semiotics shape humans – challenging the belief that, instead, humans shape and employ those rules (Vannini 2007:115). Social semiotics rejects such ideas that are in support of structural determinism, choosing to assign meaning to power. In other words, social semiotics relies on the belief that meaning arises from human interaction and socialisation (Vannini 2007:115-116). Advocates of social semiotics, Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress (in Chandler 2001:10) argue that "the social dimension of semiotic systems are so intrinsic to their nature and function that the systems cannot be studied in isolation.

I employ semiotics in my analyses of visual material that feature three subjects: Michaela DePrince, Joe Powell-Main and Freefall Dance Company. Images have been obtained from videos and films that are, in various ways, performances by the subjects. The visual material semiotically analysed in the first part of Chapter Three are screenshots from two videos of DePrince: *To Be Naked* (2018) and *Portrait* (2016). The second part of the chapter, focused on Powell-Main semiotically considers three videos: a performance with the Royal Ballet (2022), a performance at the One Young World Summit (2022) and a trailer video of *Sleepwalker* (2023). Chapter Four's semiotic section analyses two performance films by Freefall Dance Company: *We Are Here* (2019) and *We Dance* (2012). I consider these images from a semiotic perspective as part of a larger exploration of and discussion on each subject. The second methodology employed by this dissertation in these chapters is that of hermeneutics.

1.4.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics can be described as a process of textual interpretation or locating meaning within writing (Byrne 2001:968). Originally, hermeneutics was seen as an approach to, or interpretation of, biblical texts. With time, however, it developed into a system through which to understand humanity (Byrne 2001:968). Hermeneutics, as a methodology of understanding, could be applied to religion, humanism and now also to the rising field of social sciences (Demeterio 2001:2). This methodology relates to interpretation and understanding, speaking to the way in which humans understand texts and communication through interpretive procedures (Boerboom 2018:2). Hermeneutics describes the meaning behind texts, both for the producer of the text and the interpreter of the text (Boerboom 2018:2). This allows understanding to drive "particular communicative action and speech" (Boerboom 2018:2). Even though there exists no single, complete definition of hermeneutics, it is generally associated with qualitative research and studies that employ language as foundation for interpretation (Byrne 2001:968).

Since a *hermeneutically driven* methodology relies on qualitative research, analysis and critique, it proposes that the 'real' is essentially social and unpredictable in its measurement and description (Boerboom 2018:4). I thus acknowledge that any interpretation is guided, inevitably, by governing ideological concepts and experiences (Boerboom 2018:4). Thorough consideration of hermeneutics does, however, speak to perspective.

Hermeneutics implicates three assumptions, starting with the assumption that knowledge and understanding are grounded in history and culture (Boerboom 2018:2). The entire population of the world do not, therefore, share a single "empirical reality of knowledge". Rather, different groups connect through certain collective understandings (Boerboom 2018:2-3). Another assumption is that a version of reality is created by humans, based on perceptual prejudices and social contact with others (Boerboom 2018:3). Communication between individuals can result in "an organising principle" that unifies one group while separating it from others (Boerboom 2018:3). The final assumption deals with the procedure of meaning-making. What must be strived for is an understanding of an

interpretive group as well as the restriction of enforcing other ideologies unto this understanding (Boerboom 2018:3).

A shift from traditional perspectives and beliefs to an alternative take on the subject of the disfigured or disabled ballet dancer, can be explained through critical hermeneutics as explained by Jurgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who are among those theorists who advocated this methodology. A key intention of critical hermeneutics is to shed light on concealed power disparities, proposing to defy problematic social circumstances (Byrne 2001:968). Gadamer underscored the roots of language in humans' interpretation of their surroundings and circumstances. He focused on the role of the past and tradition(s) on such interpretation, arguing that these factors are responsible for intrinsic human prejudices (Byrne 2001:969). Opposing many other hermeneutic philosophers, Gadamer's critical hermeneutics was based upon the fact that understanding is not only enhanced by past experience, but also bound by it (Byrne 2001:969). Critical hermeneutic theorists have shown that certain powers – originally seen as minor or harmless – could now enter text(s). These powers, such as ideology and/or false consciousness, can be identified by critical hermeneutics and subsequently extracted from a text so that it can be interpreted in its truth, without any distortion (Demeterio 2001:6-7). Hermeneutics fit the frame of my research: a literature study intending to create a new perspective through which to consider ballet and to construct new meanings of disfigurement, disability and ballet for and by the dancer who is "different".

A critical hermeneutic approach to my research allows for an exploration of the ways in which meanings – that shape understandings of disfigurement, disability and ballet – are intrinsically socially and culturally constructed (Boerboom 2018:5). The examples of my study – two dancers, presenting respectively as disfigured and physically disabled, as well as a ballet company involved with the representation and inclusion of individuals with cognitive disabilities – will be considered in such a frame of mind. These analyses take place in Chapters Three and Four. As noted above, a hermeneutic analysis of each subject will be followed by a semiotic analysis, considering selected films and photographs of these subjects.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Performing art can promote social inclusion, when considered "as a means of expression and development" and "an approach to creative activity that connects artists and local communities" (Collins, Rentschler, Williams & Azmat 2022:308). On a personal level, such art holds value in improving self-esteem. At a social level, it improves and reinforces social unity and inclusion, and speaks to problematic social matters (Collins *et al* 2022:308). The arts are believed to provide opportunities for social inclusion and healing, encouraging participation and inspiring social understanding (Collins *et al* 2022:309). Ayse Collins, Ruth Rentschler, Karen Williams and Fara Azmat (2022:309) do, however, identify certain barriers to achieving such inclusion in the arts which negatively affect people with disabilities. In addition, they point to the lack of scrutiny and academic consideration that this subject has received (Collins *et al* 2022:309). This dissertation specifically takes into consideration the genre of ballet as a performing art.

Marlene le Roux, Harsha Kathard and Theresa Lorenzo (2021:2) argue that, by promoting change, the performing arts – which include ballet – are integral to any culture. The space in which such art is generated allows for inspiring and empowering interaction, and encourages the development of self-determination (le Roux, Kathard & Lorenzo 2021:4). While I have come across many scholarly works on the subject of ballet, it occurred to me that most are inclined to disapprove of the art form and are often heavily critical of ballet. A supreme example of this can be found in an article titled *Five Things I Hate About Ballet* (2006) by Lewis Segal, which encapsulates a number of prevalent criticisms of ballet. As mentioned, Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012:107) refer to the stigmas and accusations against the art form as "ballet bashing", which serve to point out any and all negative effects ballet is believed to have on a person's physical and psychological state, as well as its perceived exclusivity and strict methods. As noted, these predisposed perspectives refuse to consider the enjoyment, fulfilment and positives of ballet (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou 2012:111).

Literature on ballet as empowering and inclusive is very rare – if not non-existent in many fields of study. Research on the positive attributes of ballet is indeed very recent – most of these studies, some of which I make reference to in this dissertation, are published after

2012 – with minor exceptions, such as the work of Hanna (1995), although she considers dance in general. Moreover, while there may exist literature on the potentials and positive capabilities of ballet, research specifically on the destigmatisation, inclusion and empowerment of disability and disfigurement in this context is even more limited. The notion of disability and disfigurement within the field of art has been remarkably disregarded (Collins *et al* 2022:308). In a recent study conducted by Collins *et al* (2022:325) it has been argued that art, as a means of communication, grants individuals with disability and/or disfigurement self-respect and expose the worth of their involvement. While the inclusion of these individuals has recently gained some attention and success, Collins *et al* (2022:322) believe that art has not yet been sufficiently studied in its power and capability to overcome social barriers that prevent inclusion and destigmatisation. Moreover, regardless of the strategies implemented and attempts made by charitable organisations to include people with disabilities, critical understandings of art and disability remain highly under-researched (Collins *et al* 2022:313). Until now, inadequate efforts have been made to enable interaction between disabled and non-disabled individuals, which would prove to relieve feelings of abnormality and exclusion, and create a sense of belonging (Collins *et al* 2022:313-314).

The lack of research done from this viewpoint stands in contrast with infinite accounts that criticise the art of dance, specifically ballet. There is a clear imbalance here: an under-representation of the approval and appreciation of ballet compared to its condemnation. Alternative approaches to interpreting and understanding ballet are crucial (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou 2012:112-115). This dissertation seeks to determine and demonstrate how ballet is inclusive of performers with disfigurement and disabilities. I wish to position ballet within the field of visual culture as a method of art that provides creativity and expression, as well as destigmatises, includes and even empowers othered individuals.

1.6 Chapter Outlines

This chapter intended to briefly introduce the problematics of a criticising view on ballet, a view which is heavily relied upon in academic work and profoundly outweighs any constructive and optimistic thinking about the art form. A troubling theme in need of

critical attention emerges when considering notions of disability and disfigurement within the arts, specifically ballet – a topic that is constantly overlooked in critical studies. This chapter points to three key research questions, namely: (1) What is the importance and inclusive potential of a multidimensional perspective on a) the disabled or disfigured body and b) the art of ballet within the fields of performing arts and visual culture? (2) How can a multidimensional perspective on body and dance, specifically ballet, challenge and change dominant representations and understandings of persons with disfigurement, physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities? (3) How can ballet, through this multidimensional perspective, be reimagined as an inclusive method of art that produces creativity and expression and, more importantly, facilitates social inclusion and destigmatisation of persons with disfigurement, physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities?

Relevant existing literature on the subject(s) is reviewed in Chapter Two. The following chapters consist of a review, exploration and interpretation of literature, analyses of body and dance – in particular, the genre of ballet – as well as a critical consideration of multidimensionality both in body and in ballet that intends to reinforce the main arguments of this study. Examples and accounts of dancers, dance institutions and creative productions form part of the analyses. Chapter Two explores and builds on a selection of literature on the body, dance, disability and disfigurement, focusing on different socio-cultural understandings of these subjects as well as related themes.

In Chapter Three I analyse the body and different dancers in terms of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. My focus in this chapter is on the dancer with disfigurement and the dancer with physical disability. Chapter Four shifts the focus from the body to the dance, and will look into a dance company and ballet as an art form, once again in terms of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This chapter specifically addresses cognitive disability within the world of dance. Chapters Three and Four intend to employ notions of multidimensionality. These concepts are first analysed with relation to the body and to dance, respectively, after which the study seeks to fuse dancer with dance, in particular the dancer with disability and/or disfigurement, serving as core substantiation of the argument(s) of this dissertation.

Chapter Five offers a summary of the above chapters as well as a conclusion to the research questions and aims. Here, I also attend to potential limitations of the study and briefly comment on suggestions and opportunities for future and/or further research.

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORATION OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter takes the shape of an extensive exploration and review of a variety of literature on body and dance. Due to the extent of the literature, theories and concepts considered, this chapter is split into two parts, namely **body** and **ballet**. The first part is focused on the body, in particular the disfigured body and the disabled body, as well as various ideas and notions that supplement a socio-cultural perspective on and understanding of these bodies. The second part, while still regarding the body, is focused on ballet. The literature explored in the latter part of this chapter considers disfigured and disabled bodies in the context of the performing arts. A fundamental concept in both parts of this chapter is that of multidimensionality. Other themes that surface in this chapter also prove significant to the analyses and subsequent findings of this dissertation.

2.2 Body

This section commences by exploring the body as subject in relation to notions that critically consider its functioning, appearance, cultural interpretation and social significance. I am particularly interested in literature on disfigurement and disability in dance. I endeavour to apply many of the theories which I reflect on, either with regards to physical disability, cognitive disability or disfigurement, specifically in the art and discipline of ballet.

Theories and arguments relevant to this dissertation's multidimensional perspective often specifically consider the face as opposed to the body, or the face as separate from the body. I believe the reason behind this scholarly focus on the face lies in its importance in communication and identification, which I discuss below. In the field of visual culture, considering the relevance of the body in the engagement with and performance of ballet (and not merely the face), I wish to apply those theories and arguments to the body as a whole. In other words, upon exploring and reviewing literature on multidimensionality, a key theme of this dissertation, I seized the opportunity to consider the body (beyond the face) from a multidimensional perspective. I thus view the body, and not merely the face, as multidimensional. I introduce the notions of perceived ab/normality and subsequent

social perceptions of the face, as well as facial dimensionality as put forth by two groups of scholars. Extending theories to pertain to the entire body opens them up to the enormous range and scope of physical and cognitive disability and disfigurement, of which the impairment very often affects areas of the body apart from the face. It is worth noting that many disabilities are also invisible. I elaborate on disability and disfigurement, as well as the concept of impairment, in ensuing sections and chapters.

2.1.1 Social Perceptions of the Body & Bodily Dimensions

The human face is generally defined by Gili Yaron, Agnes Meershoek, Guy Widdershoven and Jenny Slatman (2017:288) as a "self-forgetfulness", relating to invisibility or nonappearance. The face withdraws itself from awareness, as opposed to appearing distinctly within it as an object of visibility. The face, in its absence, allows for bodies and objects to interact effortlessly within a given environment, offering the individual an accommodating lifeworld (Yaron, Meershoek, Widdershoven, Van den Brekel & Slatman *et al* 2017:288). Martindale (2015:28) acknowledges the face's significance as a body part with implications that extend beyond the individual. The face, amongst other things, allows for sense-making of the world, communication and for humans to recognise one another. Many scholars argue that identity is situated in the face (Martindale 2015:28). Supportive of Yaron *et al's* paper – also as argued by Drew Leder (1990:21-22) – Martindale also discusses the idea of the "normal" face as absent from conscious thought whilst suggesting the opposite for the "abnormal" face and body. In other words, the disfigured face, unlike the "normal" face, fails to exist as an ordinary entity, and subsequently it appears and partakes actively in perception and awareness. This same approach can be taken towards the rest of the body, regardless of the location or nature of an individual's impairment.

Social labels – such as ab/normal, a/typical, stigmatised – fail to consider the complexity and ambiguity within the relationships between individuals who are thought to represent these labels (Cahill & Eggleston 2005:683). Spencer Cahill and Robin Eggleston (2005:648) point out that consideration of individuals with disabilities routinely involves and relies upon terms such as deviation, stigma and liminality. The disfigured or disabled body is said to result in a disruption of commonplace actions in that it dislocates one's

perception, sensation and observation. Difference becomes visible, attracting unsought awareness accrued by the disfigurement or disability (Yaron *et al* 2017:285-286). Commonly, such individuals are said to be treated as other, disregarded as invalid non-persons (Cahill & Eggleston 2005:684-686). Public experiences and perceptions of persons with disabilities and disfigurement demonstrate a complexity and uncertainty of their "place in contemporary social life" far more considerable than their classification as stigmatised implies (Cahill & Eggleston 2005:695). These individuals are said to be in a state of liminality, "betwixt and between" fixed social labels and positions (Cahill & Eggleston 2005:695).

Diane Perpich (2019:243) claims that "[n]o individual is reducible to a list of qualities and no portrait of the other, in words or images, can capture all that a person is". This statement aligns with and underscores the importance of a multidimensional perspective on the body. As noted in Chapter One, I make use of the theory of Grabher (2016), based on Levinas, in order to shape a definition and specification of the body's multidimensionality. While Grabher's work is concerned with the face, I find his approach equally effective and valuable in a study of the body beyond the face. Subsequently, I adapt his theory of multidimensionality to consider the *dancing body* – one of two key subjects/concerns of this dissertation (the other being the dance/ballet itself) – in all of its dimensions.

Grabher (2016), building on Levinas's theory of ethics, identifies three dimensions that make up the human face. Grabher (2016) argues that the face is indicative of identity, while also confessing that it is not exclusively accountable for identity. In addition, the face serves as our fundamental communicative mechanism, it accommodates our senses, and it offers and acquires knowledge from one person to the next. Such knowledge that can be obtained ranges from unique identification markers to data regarding race, age and sex (Grabher 2016:133). Grabher (2016:131) recollects a question posed by Picasso: "*Am I supposed to paint what is on the face, what is in the face, or what is behind the face?*". The prepositions drawn from this question suggest three parts, or dimensions: namely *on* face, *in* face and *behind* face. Seeing that this question is asked by a painter, one can argue that this usage of the term "face" refers to the first dimension and, possibly, the second

dimension as well of a Grabher-Levinas description of the face. What is on and in this face is seen as part of the face, but when Picasso refers to what is *behind* the face, he sees the face in its third dimension – that which lies behind (or beneath) the first and second dimensions. I argue that this description of the face falls short in failing to consider this dimension *as* the face, but instead seeing it as *behind* the face. Thus, what is *on* the face and *in* the face are considered *as* the face, but what is *behind* the face is not seen *as* the face. Subsequently, this question demonstrates a predisposition to reduce the face to that which is visible to the observer, but at the same time detects and underscores Grabher's three dimensions of the face. In applying this perspective to the body, one can rephrase Picasso's question as follows: Am I supposed to paint the outside surface of the body, what lies physically inside the body, or what is buried internally within (and beyond) the physical body? In other words, the dimensions here refer to what is *on* the body, what is physically *in* the body, and what is psychologically, emotionally and spiritually *contained within* the body.

Dissecting this question reveals its seemingly careless separation of the third dimension of the face from its second and first dimensions. However, while the painter's work is predominantly visual, he does look beyond the surface – at least, to *understand* his subject, if not to illustrate it – before he paints a picture of it. This question, simultaneously straightforward and complex, underscores the existence of three dimensions within the body. Yet, it does so while exposing our habitual human tendency to reduce the body to merely a visual entity. This very tendency becomes apparent in many popularly utilised theories of the body, which prove insufficient in a just and thorough consideration of the face.

Grabher (2016:131) identifies the three dimensions of the face as follows. The first dimension is the "sur-face", which is generally directly visible. This dimension can thus be seen as the open and outward appearance of the face. Beyond this dimension there is a second, "mobile dimension" that is responsible for the transmission of thought, emotion and state of mind (Grabher 2016:131). The third and final dimension of the face is invisible and is understood to represent an individual (Grabher 2016:131). Grabher's

dimensions, applied to the body beyond the face, serves as this dissertation's classification of the body's dimensions.

Levinas (in Grabher 2016:132) veers away from western thinking surrounding the self and the other. By reversing and unravelling approaches, such as a focus on function – while neglecting structure – he emphasises the need to consider both the form (structure) of the face and the event (experience) of the face, not simply the one *or* the other (Grabher 2016:132). Proving the face's (and the body's) three-dimensionality can be done by locating and interpreting theories and concepts such as abjection, performance, control gained through dance, restoration, and disfigurement and/or disability itself. I consider these notions, respectively and in relation to one another, in this chapter. In facilitating the connection between the body and ballet, I make us of the term multidimensionality (as opposed to three-dimensionality) throughout this dissertation. Many scholarly studies have insufficiently analysed the face, considering its surface and its intermediary section, while neglecting a significant and active third dimension (as argued by Grabher). I believe this philosophy can successfully extend and apply to the human body, beyond the face. With respect to the human body (beyond the face), the first dimension considers the outward appearance of a person or body. The second, movable dimension relates to the structure of the body, the mechanics and the functioning of the physical body beyond its surface. While the act of communication itself does not take place verbally or facially through the rest of the body, it can be done through body language, signs and movement. Finally, the third dimension relates to the inner being, identity and self that resides within a given body. Abraham Maslow[4] (in Serlin 2020:179) also takes a multidimensional stance towards understanding the body, describing the "whole person" as a "fully growing and self-fulfilling human being, one in whom all his potentialities are coming to full development, the one whose inner nature expresses itself freely".

[4] Maslow's holistic approach can be seen as an alternative "to the dominant natural science paradigm" (Bland & DeRobertis 2020:935). Andrew Bland and Eugene DeRobertis argue that Maslow significantly contributed to "contemporary existential-humanistic developmental thought" (Bland & DeRobertis 2020:952). Serlin's whole person approach, uniting mind, body and spirit, is founded on Maslow's hierarchy of needs – more specifically, his theory of self-actualisation (Serlin 2000:179). A self-actualising individual is not fixated on "immature or incomplete levels of growth", but rather strives for, among other things, "unity of personality", "spontaneous expressiveness" and creativity (Bland & DeRobertis 2020:935).

The work of Glenis Mark and Antonia Lyons (2014:294) adds to a multidimensional understanding of the body by taking into account "[t]he intangible nature of the mind, body, spirit". Apart from indigenous models of healing, "the biopsychosocial and biopsychosocial-spiritual models" are employed by Mark and Lyons (2014:294) as examples of means to restoration of the "nonphysical aspects" of an individual. A multidimensional perspective on the body allows for a holistic consideration of, and subsequent restoration of, the mind, body and spirit (Mark & Lyons 2014:294). It is important to understand, through viewing the body as multidimensional, that illness affects a person as a whole (Mark & Lyons 2014:298). Subsequently, thorough restoration requires consideration and understanding of the person as a whole.

Note that Grabher (2016:131) identifies the second dimension (moveable intermediary dimension) as a vehicle for what lies beyond, within the third dimension (self, identity). This does not imply that the absence of a second dimension denies the existence of a third dimension. However, while it may be argued that the second dimension carries the third dimension to the first (for example, by way of physical expression of emotions), the third dimension's functioning and/or actuality is not dependent on either of the first or second dimensions. The absence or impairment of the body's physical structure (for example, the eyes) does not deny the existence of this body's capability to experience or express emotions that would typically be understood through physicality (for example, crying). This is because the third dimension is in itself representative of the individual and his/her identity (Grabher 2016:131). Accepting the view of Grabher (2016) requires not only a recognition of the body and its demeanor as existing beyond a visible dimension, but also a recognition of the significance of this existence. Thus, the human body cannot simply be considered in its literal sense, or through pure physicality. Considering the metaphoric or symbolic aspects of the body is crucial. Subsequently, the body can be seen as interconnected with the social, bodily and artistic issues that are to be dealt with in this study (Albright 1997:84). The analyses of this dissertation will draw on such a multidimensional view of the body in order to construct a meaningful perspective on, and subsequent comprehensive analysis, of the body, specifically the disfigured or disabled body in dance.

Understanding the multidimensionality of the body with respect to illness, disability, disfigurement or other bodily conditions is critical to this study. S. Ueda and Y. Okawa speak of a "psychological-existential suffering" in explaining the inner dimension of the body (2003:599). Subjective experience comes into being as a result of the functioning and reaction of what lies within the body's third dimension – including elements such as personality, self-image, beliefs, experience (Ueda & Okawa 2003:599). Understanding subjective experience allows individuals with disability and disfigurement to achieve "empowerment, autonomy and self-determination" (Ueda & Okawa 2003:600). I have now outlined a primary framework through which I consider the body: the body exists within physical, cognitive, social/cultural, emotional and spiritual dimensions, which can be classified according to Grabher's three dimensions. Throughout this dissertation, when speaking of the body's multidimensionality, I will be regarding the body in Grabher's three dimensions, namely the first (surface) dimension, second (moveable, intermediary) dimensions and third (inner, self, identity) dimension. Next, I explore literature on the notions of disfigurement, disability and impairment in order to formulate an understanding thereof, which I wish to apply within this multidimensional framework.

2.1.2 Defining Disfigurement, Disability and Impairment

Disfigurement can be defined as "the aesthetic effects of a mark, rash, scar or skin graft on … [the] skin or an [irregularity] or paralysis to [the] face or body (Changing Faces in Martindale 2015:22). According to S. Kay Toombs, illness is "the disorder of body, self and world", relating to what Yaron *et al* call 'disruptions' of sociality through the 'disruption' of facial or bodily function (Toombs 1988:202). Simon Williams (2000:1) maintains that life and death, with illness and disability somewhere in between, reveal the matter of bodies and the limitations of identities. Williams (2000:1) argues for a broader notion of illness and, seeing that congenital disorders and/or fluctuations in health status are often not included in general understandings of the illness, points out the insufficiency of the term as ephemeral. For the purpose of this dissertation, disfigurement can be understood as any condition that affects the appearance of the body within the first and/or second dimension, but also affects the body in its third dimension due to, among many

factors, dominant social ideologies and expectations that (mis)judge the body based on its appearance.

Disability, similarly, is a term deemed far from neutral and certainly also a term that has, as of yet, not been thoroughly discovered and discussed in critical studies that (cl)aim to deconstruct dominant western ideology (Whatley 2007:6). Carol Thomas (2004:569-570) identifies two approaches that consider the notion of disability, one of which is informed by disability studies and the other by medical sociology. The former approach insists that disability is built on "social oppression, inequality and exclusion", while the latter rests on the philosophy that views disability as a product of "illness and impairment", and involves "suffering and … social disadvantage" (Thomas 2004:570). Thomas acknowledges the different sociologies of and perspectives on disability, along with their critiques. While these approaches are commonly seen as incompatible and conflicting, Thomas (2004:570-580) notes an agreement on the notion of disability among numerous theorists, all of whom accept impairment – I expand on this term below – as a fundamental cause of restrictions of disability. She remarks the inadequacy of the social model of disability in that it denies this causal tie. Jennifer Eiseinhauer (2007:10) maintains that, traditionally, the disabled body is positioned as a "public spectacle". She exposes the ways in which disabled individuals are dehumanised by citing the (previously) utilised terms "specimen to be analysed" and "curiosity to entertain" (Eisenhauer 2007:11). Such social understandings of the disabled body are shown to reinforce the ab/normality binary (Eisenhauer 2007:11). These understandings of disability (and of disfigurement) are discussed in a later section of this chapter. From the perspective of this study, disability and disfigurement can further be understood and analysed in terms of Grabher's dimensionality as well as other themes that are still to be explored in this chapter, and will thereafter be analysed. I use the term disability to refer to physical and cognitive impairments that, due to social norms and dominant beliefs, hold detrimental consequences for persons who live with the impairments – such as stigmatisation, exclusion and oppression. I argue, however, that these consequences can be reduced and perhaps even overcome through a multidimensional consideration of the body.

G. Thomas Couser (2005:602) explains that a disability can affect a person's senses, mobility, the body's form and/or its function. In addition, disability can be either "static or progressive, congenital or acquired … visible or invisible". It is important to distinguish between impairments that affect one's physical functioning and those that affect one's intellectual or cognitive functioning. Moreover, it is necessary to critically consider the ways in which the model(s) of disability regard both these categories of impairment. I refer to the work of Jackie Leach Scully (2004), Johnson Cheu (2005) and Beverley Ann Fudge Schormans (2011) in formulating as well as critiquing understandings and representations of disability. As noted, this theme will be expanded on in a subsequent section. One of the approaches identified by Thomas, based on a biomedical perspective, has been criticised in more recent years for locating disability within an individual and producing an incomplete understanding of the term that does not consider the experience thereof (Thomas 2004:570). Aligning with this argument, Arthur Kleinman (in Hanna 1995:326) powerfully distinguishes a bodily or health condition from the *experience* thereof by an individual. While, to a degree, "pain" is induced by the condition itself, individuals also experience vulnerability, distress or fear and socio-psychological suffering. Certain academics, such as Scully (2004:651), nevertheless insist on the relevance and benefit of utilising this approach, as it explains "[e]xactly what constitutes disease, degeneration, defect or deficit" in a medical sense. Yet, because of the limitations of the biomedical model of disability, the social model emerged with the purpose of separating "impairment" from "the disabled experience" (Scully 2004:651). In defining and understanding disability, the latter approach, according to Scully (2004:651), does not neglect biological factors, but simply insists on the equal consideration of "societal, economic and environmental factors".

Fudge Schormans (2011:26-27), also critical of the social model of disability, argues that it lacks thorough consideration of intellectual disabilities. Moreover, she argues that, while the social model is critical of negative cultural impacts on the representation of people with disabilities, it fails "to address … the potentially limiting and restrictive effects and individual experience of impairment" – in Thomas and Mairian Corker's (in Fudge Schormans 2011:28) explanation, there is an emphasis on the "doing" or sociality of disability, and no consideration of the "being" or natural impairment that disability

comprises. Subsequently, the physicality and experience of impairment is not considered. Fudge Schormans (2011:29) finds that the major concern here is that the social model of disability positions disability as a social construct, disregarding, for instance, the fact that those with intellectual disabilities "may not be readily amenable to, or completely alleviated by, social, political, economic or linguistic change". Similarly, those with physical disabilities may not be released from their impairment simply by considering social, cultural or political aspects, while disregarding the physicality and reality of the impairment itself. Rather, a sufficient perspective on disability is one that addresses the social issues as well as the personal issues that come with disability.

Cheu (2005) addresses the same controversy regarding the term *disability*, claiming that it is culturally rooted in medical notions of *impairment*. In order to effectively comprehend the above arguments, I consider a definition of the term *impairment*. Recently, scholars have distinguished between the terms *impairment* and *disability*, the former relating "the physical and psychological medical conditions of the body", while the latter relates to cultural perceptions, interpretations and experience of these conditions – for example, stigmatisation, stereotyping, exclusion and negative representations (Cheu 2005:135). Impairment, according to the International Classification of Functioning, is defined as any problem with the body's functioning or alteration in the body's structure (Hayden & Prince 2020:4). Disability can therefore be seen as an umbrella term for a condition that results in impairment. These impairments may affect an individual's ability to see, move, think, remember, learn, communicate or hear, or affect his/her mental health and/or social relationships (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [sa]). Importantly, the experience of disability varies from one person to the next. The same disability can affect two different individuals in two very different ways. It is also worth noting that not all disabilities are conspicuous (Centers for … [sa]). It is crucial to understand that, in some cases, medical or rehabilitating processes can reduce or remove a person's disability or disfigurement. Inversely, disability and disfigurement can occur and affect any person at any time – for instance, as a result of illness. Subsequently, both disability and disfigurement are unique in comparison with other themes that constitute marginalised groups, proving exceedingly variable and fluid (Couser 2005:602).

2.1.3 The Visibility of Nonconformity

The previous section offered a basic understanding of the notions of disfigurement and disability. However, in a social context, these understandings do not suffice to explain the reception and perception of and response to encountering individuals with disfigurement and disability. It is necessary to consider the ideologies and principles that govern social understanding and interpretation of disfigurement and disability. This section reflects on common perspectives of and subsequent consequences for individuals with disfigurement and/or disabilities within a socio-cultural environment.

Juxtaposing disability as unfavourable and "ability" or "normality" as favourable, enhances cultural markers that determine the lens through which the disabled (or disfigured) body is viewed (Elks 2005:275). Accordingly, Albright (1997:58) notes how the disabled (or disfigured) body must, according to societal expectations, be covered. Accordingly, the disfigured or disabled body must compensate or overcome its difference in a desperate attempt to classify as normal (Albright 1997:58). It is easy to reason that such expectation is further enhanced in the world of ballet, particularly in the space of the stage. For many argue that, within this space the absent body is not so absent after all, since it is a body deliberately put on display, under observation and, subsequently, under constant criticism. In response to this view, Albright (1997:58) calls for a negotiation between a) the representation of the body as an instrument on stage and b) the body in its true, real and personal physical world. I return to the disfigured and/or disabled body on stage in a later section.

Speaking to the visibility of difference, Lynn Harter, Jennifer Scott, David Novak, Mark Leeman and Jerimiah Morris (2006:13) argue that "the exterior of the differentiated body" is what attracts the majority of public attention, both in social circumstances and in dominant (or traditional) discourses of disability. Jane Frances (2012:114) considers the (extra)ordinary (anti)social experiences of people with disfigurement. She employs the term "civil inattention", coined by Frances Macgregor (1990), to explain the visibility-invisibility dichotomy. The term is used to describe the "not noticing, not staring or commenting" as a social response to those who are considered normal (Frances 2012:114). People with disfigurement (or disability), according to Frances, are denied

this civil inattention (2012:115). Similarly, Yaron *et al* (2017:285-286) argue that the atypicality of the human face (or, as I extend the argument, the body) results in a disruption of commonplace actions in that it dislocates one's perception, sensation and observation. Whereas the face/body ought to be an "absent background", it now becomes visible, attracting to it unsought awareness (Yaron *et al* 2017:285-286). Such undesired attention is accrued by the atypicality of the face/body, and is not merely on the part of the observer. The disfigured individual also becomes aware of his/her appearance. Subsequently, these individuals continuously fashion ways to obscure their disfigurement (in an attempt) to "render their … difference inconspicuous and … avoid unwanted attention" (Yaron *et al* 2017:298-300).

We can now understand that the absence of the body, in its "normality", allows its owner to engage in social interactions with ease. On the contrary, individuals with bodily atypicality occupy a lifeworld that is obstructive (Yaron *et al* 2017:288). The body now fails to exist in absence and transparency, drawing attention by presenting as dysfunctional. As Leder (in Yaron *et al* 2017:288) puts it, the face (or body) *dys*-appears and in doing so interferes with the individual's "immersion in [their] lifeworld". Many disfigured individuals (attempt to) conceal their atypicality – for instance, by using prosthetic devices – permitting them to "*pass as normal"* and as such avoid stigma. Goffman (in Yaron *et al* 2017:298) notes that the reward accompanying normality results in a conscious and intentional effort to present oneself as normal on certain occasions.

From Grabher's perspective, one can interpret this process through consideration of the multidimensionality of the body. Upon encountering a disfigured body, one fails to react ethically due to the visibility of the disfigurement which attracts attention. In most severe cases of disfigurement, there is some form of impairment in the second dimension, inhibiting the face or body from communicating in its natural way, that would allow for interpretation. The observer's gaze is fixed on the damage or distortion, and as a result one loses sight of the individual "as a whole" (the third dimension) (Grabher 2016:131). The observer reduces the disfigured individual to their distortion. The observed individual's identity is now reduced to the appearance and physicality of his/her disfigurement – to the first and second, or sometimes only *either* the first *or* the second

dimension. Upon being looked at by those with "normal" faces and bodies, disfigured persons thus lose their sense of identity. The observer appropriates the disfigured body and eliminates its owner and his/her identity (Grabher 2016:133). It can thus be argued that ideologically driven social perspectives on disfigurement (and visible disability) fall short in their failure to view the body in its multidimensionality. Accordingly, a multidimensional understanding of the body is capable of challenging, perhaps even discrediting, such perspectives – involving socio-political rejection and degradation – on disfigurement and disability.

2.1.4 Dominant Understandings and Representations of Difference

Thomas Hehir (in Hayden & Prince 2020:2) explains ableist preferences and prevailing negative views on disability by stating that the social world we inhabit assumes that it is "better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids".

Darren Newbury (in Fudge Schormans 2011:39) underscores the capacity of visual, artistic or illustrative undertakings, such as photography, to 1) enable the exploration and reconstruction of perceptions of disability (and disfigurement) and 2) rethink the representation thereof. However, dominant representations of difference often refuse such exploration and reconsideration, promoting instead traditions, beliefs and ideologies that serve to exclude, reject and reduce those who are (mis)represented. I consider in this section some of the ways in which disability and disfigurement have been represented in the past and present, and the harmful impacts thereof on those people who are and have been (mis)represented. While the largest part of literature on this topic concentrates on disability, I argue that a similar stance has been taken towards people with disfigurement – thus, I apply the theorists' notions and ideas explored in this section to both subjects. People with disfigurement and disability are constantly othered by being depicted "as different" and "far removed from normative constructions" (Fudge Schormans 2011:200).

Mark Jackson (1995) considers the effects of visual representations of cognitive disabilities and disorders in the context of medical documentation and diagnosis. These representations have intended to exhibit visible aspects of various conditions, to aid in diagnoses, to classify individuals accordingly, as well as to "reveal prognosis and", sometimes, "to demonstrate the efficacy of therapy" (Jackson 1995:321). Visual representations found in medical documentation also positioned individuals with mental conditions within a distinct subdivision of society, rendering them visible and deviant (Jackson 1995:321). The images of physical difference considered by Jackson (1995:324), are said to have intended to demonstrate the features that classify an individual as having a specific mental condition.

The problematics of photographic representation lies in the, only later recognised, fact that a purely visual account of an object, place or individual is not "an accurate reflection of reality" (Jackson 1995:332). Thus, by attempting to define what lies beyond the image, medical documentation constructed "typologies of deficiency" that, while concerned largely with physical attributes, also included assumptions about "temperament, morality, behaviour and character" (Jackson 1995:332). The portrayal of (physical) difference in these accounts were thus believed to provide and aid in diagnosing and classifying, as well as connecting physical attributes to mental attributes (Jackson 1995:333). This type of consideration of a person and his/her medical condition proves insufficient, controlled by dominant social perceptions, as opposed to regarding other aspects of the person – such as their third dimension. Stigmatisation and subsequent discrimination resulted, positioning people with cognitive disabilities as anomalous, deficient, degenerate and deviant (Jackson 1995:334). Society therefore insisted upon the continuous surveillance and management of these individuals, so as to control them. Linking with the work of Leder and Yaron *et al*, these processes collectively render people with difference "visible" (Jackson 1995:334).

Robert Bogdan (2012:2) considers the "visual rhetoric [and] patterns of conventions" found within images. Elements of importance include the position of the subject, props, background and setting, as well as the presence or absence of other subjects, all of which are subject to manipulation. The subject's clothing, facial and bodily expression, lighting,

angles, and other elements also add "to photographic variation", says Bogdan (2012:2). He considers the image and representation of difference in an entertainment context – analysing the ways in which people with visible difference have been portrayed in past forms of entertainment, such as circuses, as well as forms of entertainment that are still prevalent today, such as photography and film.

In earlier centuries, representations of people with visible disabilities and deformities included events that were intended to provide the public with amusement and entertainment, such as museums, circuses and carnivals – in which the exhibition of difference was described as "freak shows", and therefore labelling those individuals as "freaks" (Bogdan 2012:7). Bogdan (2012:10) demonstrates the misrepresentation behind these exhibitions, pointing to the elaborate lies that exaggerate(d) bodily difference. This occurred in two primary ways: the aggrandized and the exotic mode (Bogdan 2012:11). The first involves a flaunting representation that exaggerates an individual's status, lifestyle and talents, while the second involves a blown-up, negative representation that alienates, estranges and reduces the individual to their perceived abnormality (Bogdan 2012:11). These two approaches may be considered in relation to the work of Ray Bull and Nichola Rumsey (in Frances 2012:120), who argue that individuals with visible difference (specifically disfigurement) are often perceived in two extremes, viewed either extremely favourably or negatively. Bogdan (2012:18) also notes a combination of these two representations, resulting in the labelling of people with disabilities as "comic fools". Critically, Frances (2012:117) notes that the staging of these "freak shows" was a means of managing difference and preventing the integration of "freaks" into "normal" society.

Bogdan (2012:115-116) also demonstrates the ways in which people with physical and cognitive disabilities (non-fictional people with real disabilities and actors feigning disabilities) are represented in films. Horror and gangster genres are the most prominent of genres in which these characters are depicted, frequently positioning the person with difference as a monster, "scarred, deformed, [disfigured] … and mentally impaired", who does horrendous things (Bogdan 2012:115-116). These representations connect physical and cognitive difference with derogatory qualities that attach these individuals to myths about violence or danger (Bogdan 2012:116). Although these portrayals have been

identified in the early emergence of horror films, today still, the genre continues to represent people with disabilities in this light (Bogdan 2012:116). Other genres, while not as common, are also shown to misrepresent disability, such as comedy films (Bogdan 2012:126).

According to Bogdan (2012:142), in the second half of the twentieth century, artistic photography, intending to capture those external to "the dominant culture", also involved the portrayal of the "freak". Harold Rosenberg (in Bogdan 2012:143) makes use of the term "Anxious Object" to understand the role of disability in art photographs. The "Anxious Object", a characteristic of modern art meant to incite unease and uncertainty, is located within images that depict the "disturbing … grotesque … weirdly fantastic". The "Anxious Object" generates "tension and ambiguity", demanding a reaction within spectators and seeking to disrupt regular inspection and interpretation of the image (Bogdan 2012:143). In other words, this process forces spectators to reconsider their routine ways of looking at art. From the 1960s, the decision was made by art photographers to capture provocative subject matter that would upset and unease spectators – the disabled subject was often used in these instances. Themes that emerged from this type of photography included "fundamental difference, dependence, and segregation" (Bogdan 1995:143).

Dominant representations of people with visible difference exaggerate their difference, rather than focusing on their true selves – the latter part of the individual is "stolen, un-exposed, hidden" and he/she is "mis-taken" (Fudge Schormans 2011:201-202). Fudge Schormans's (2011:301) consideration of a certain set of visual material demonstrates "popular and persistent un-truths", myths, of cognitive disability. Damaging stereotypical views of disability position and dismiss such people are pitiable, lesser and unknowable (Fudge Schormans 2011:303). These individuals are also often represented as different and lesser than those considered to be normal (Fudge Schormans 2011:202). Those with mental disabilities were believed to threaten the social order, firstly by being deemed "the root cause of [social] problems" (such as crime, poverty and disease), and secondly by transmitting their "neuropathic inheritance and … social ineptitude to future generations"

(Jackson 1995:323). Another myth positions the disabled or disfigured as "sick" or as a "victim" (Harter *et al* 2006:6).

As with disability, the representation of disfigurement is commonly fashioned in an unfavourable light. Recognising such negative cultural views, and referring to the same themes as Bogdan (film, freak shows, etc.), Frances (2012:113) addresses the problematics of such (mis)representations, and subsequent exclusion, of people with disfigurement. Indeed, in the performing arts, including ballet, similar problematics may arise in the representation of individuals with difference (Frances 2012:118). Disfigurement is commonly portrayed as a personal or singular issue that ought to be solved. Those living with disfigurement are commonly objectified – victims of voyeurism – and denied a voice (Frances 2012:119). Furthermore, repetitive patterns are utilised, associating these individuals "with evil, reclusiveness [and] bitterness" (Frances 2012:119). Staring, distancing oneself, as well as invasive, inappropriate questions or remarks are all examples of the social consequences of disfigurement (Frances 2012:114). Those with disfigurement suffer from "visual and verbal assaults", pitiful and hateful responses, mockery and avoidance, generating within them shameful, angry and humiliating feelings (MacGregor in Frances 2012:114). *Dys*-appearance is equated with amorality, designating those with disfigurement as inferior and subservient compared to those who are considered normal (Frances 2012:119). There is also an emphasis on extreme and rare conditions that result in disfigurement, while neglecting more common conditions.

A major concern with these depictions of disability and disfigurement is that it disrupts the efforts of those with visible difference to become independent and integrated in society (Bogdan 2012:143). John Rickman (in Frances 2012:127) stated that society teaches children what they ought to consider nice or nasty, fun or scary. Unconsciously consuming negative visual representations of people with disabilities, like those seen in various entertainment mediums, society becomes conditioned to view these people with fear, pity or ridicule (Bogdan 2012:128). Furthermore, such portrayals determine these people's visible difference as the root of entertainment and amusement, as opposed to creating a constructive and affirmative representation that allows them to be admired and

celebrated for their art and talent, and being seen as normal. Importantly, these people only become a source of entertainment and spectacle from a distance. As soon as the person with difference shares the space of the "normal" person, he/she loses his/her "status as interesting, and [becomes] appalling (Frances 2012:117). This representation becomes even more problematic when one realises that, in itself, it works to further separate those with disability and disfigurement from those who are considered normal. While Bogdan's (2012) work is predominantly concerned with past representations of people with disabilities, the understanding that he offers thereof are nonetheless very relevant and of great importance in various current fields of study. It allows us to recognise the "[p]atterns of representation" that have been framed and built upon over centuries – patterns that are still evident in many visual representations of difference to this day (Bogdan 2012:176). Bogdan (2012) argues himself that his approach can be employed in analysing current and contemporary portrayals of disability. In addition, while I do not equate disability with disfigurement and place the two within the same marginalised group, I do wish to apply the perspectives of the various theorists to the representation to those with disability as well as those with disfigurement.

On the margins of the ideological categorisation of those who are deemed different and unworthy of social integration, inclusion and acceptance, lies abjection. The next section considers the notion of abjection in relation to the disfigured or disabled body in order to demonstrate a theoretical process through which this body is (*dis*)located in isolation, separate from self and other.

2.1.5 Abjection

Barbara Creed (1986:68) offers an account of abjection, building on Julia Kristeva's[5] (1982) attempts to explore various ways abjection functions ideologically by creating a system of partition between human and non-human – or between fully constituted and partially formed subjects. During the process of abjection, ritual comes to stand as a

[5] Kristeva's work permeates the disciplines of "semiotics, psychoanalysis, political theory, and feminist theory" (Goodnow 2020:1). Her theory of abjection is based on the idea that the element of horror arises from a threat to a boundary that is set out to control the social order (Goodnow 2020:28). Such a threat leads to an encounter with what Kristeva calls "the abject", that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Goodnow 2020:28).

channel through which society renews original contact with the abject and then excludes it (Creed 1986:68). The abject is positioned in a space where meaning subsides, where the self is not. The abject appears to threaten the self to such an extent that it must be eradicated from the space occupied by the self (Creed 1986:69). Abjection occurs in several ways, often relating to biological functioning of the body or, on the other hand, to symbolic and/or religious dynamics (Creed 1986:69). Creed (1986:70) points out the ultimate abject, namely the corpse. To live, the self (the body) ejects bodily wastes that it "finds loathsome".

The notion of abjection can be effectively considered in terms of disfigurement and disability. Kristiina Koskentola (2017:5) reminds us that the abject is that which threatens one's identity and is subsequently perceived as abhorrent. Following a similar trail of thought as other scholars, she links abjection with the degeneration of identity. Accepting Grabher's assertion, that the owner of disfigurement (or disability) is denied an identity upon observation – by overlooking the body's multidimensionality – abjection of such bodies demonstrates how the identity which is denied, is the very "thing" that threatens another identity. Differently put: the identity of a disfigured or disabled individual is denied by his/her condition, which is the very thing – the abject (condition) – that endangers the identity of the "normal" individual. The abjection of the disfigurement or disability breaks its owner's identity, while simultaneously threatening to break the identity of the "normal" body.

Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987 & 1990) work [6], Koskentola (2017) relates abjection with the process of becoming. One might utilise these findings and produce, more specifically, a relation between the abjection of the disfigured body

[6] Psychoanalyst and political activist, Guattari, and French philosopher, Deleuze, collaborated for the first time in 1969. *Anti-Oedipus*, their first book – popular due to its "irreverent radicalism and its critique of psychoanalysis" – was published in 1972 (Bogue 2004:1). Deleuze and Guattari's consideration of an object involves finding "the potentials within it that will allow it to mutate into something else" (metamorphosis) and subsequently, expressing "in singular terms the more abstract rhythms that compose the universe" (Van Tuinen & Zepke 2017:8). Deleuze (in Koskentola 2017:40) sees the body as an entity in constant transformation that is simultaneously "flexible, physical and abstract". Deleuze and Guattari (in Koskentola 2017:159) make use of the term *becoming* to explain an "ahistorical path towards something new and unfamiliar". It refers to a "generative way of being that consists of fluid confluences rather than resemblances" (Koskentola 2017:159).

and becoming-contaminated. She investigates how pollution and disease involve movement between spaces and transmit from one person to the next or from one place to another (Koskentola 2017:26). If we turn to Mary Douglas[7] (1969), demonstrating that individuals with unclear identities are seen as polluted and therefore abject, we can, in turn, link the notion of becoming-contaminated with those who live with atypical bodies. Douglas (1969) asserts that the occurrence of pollution gives individuals the power to interfere with the customs and laws of society and politics, and to infect other individuals – all the more "when their bodily matter is [seen as *out of place* by] having broken its own boundaries". The disfigured or disabled body is thus rejected, even abjected, due to a fear of associating with such pollution, a fear of becoming-contaminated.

Creed (1986) sheds light on the extent of analysing ritual impurity, arguing for an anthropological explanation that appears to delve further than religion-oriented reasoning. The latter perspective argues for a "natural loathing" whereas, on the contrary, the former maintains that "nothing [can be] loathsome in itself" (Creed 1986:68). Rather, the thing, or body in this case, that challenges the classification and order of a certain symbolic system, is abject (Creed 1986:68). Thus the abject, the disfigurement or disability, cannot be loathsome in an environment where such orders and systems cease to exist. In order to be abjected, according to Kristeva's theory, an entity must cross, or threaten to cross, the borders of such order (Creed 1986:71).

Relating to the work of Yaron *et al* (2017), Martindale (2015:32) asserts that when the "normal" body becomes disfigured, it no longer functions as an unconscious vehicle of interaction. Treating or restoring such a body may repair its health and *refigure* it so it can return to its absent state. Although, in some cases, the damage might be too severe or permanent, that the body is caught "in a state of perceptual appearance" (Martindale 2015:32). This phase of visibility, thus, can either be temporary or permanent, and it can

[7] As a highly influential social anthropologist, Douglas analysed the concepts of "purity and danger" in her 1966 book of the same name. Terms such as 'filth' and 'pollution' are used, in particular to refer to unfixed identities, or identities that "are in transition rather than … firmly fixed by tradition" (Goodnow 2020:46). Kristeva defines the abject through Douglas's suggestion that 'filth' threatens social or moral order (Goodnow 2020:47). Cultures put rituals in place with the purpose of erasing or escaping the consequences of contamination, which in turn determine what ought to be experienced as horror and, on the contrary, "where safety is felt to lie" (Goodnow 2020:47).

be associated with the notion of abjection. Seeing that there is an expectation to "fix" what is "broken" and to repair the damaged body so that it can conform to the norms of certain ideological principles – the disfigured individual is thus situated in a liminal phase. Abjection can be found on different and numerous levels when considering atypical bodies. A person in this phase is loathed and/or rejected due to the other's fear of contamination (abjection) or, according to Douglas, due to this person's threat to traditional order (Martindale 2015:127).

Kristeva's theories uncover ideological biases that serve, through the process of abjection, to separate "the human from the non-human" and the whole subject from the partial subject (Creed 1986:92). Equating the disfigured or disabled person with the abject, this dissertation argues that those with disfigurement, deformity and disability live in a space of liminality, thus positioning them external to a fixed definition and interpretation. In other words, this body can neither be defined as a body, nor can it be defined as a non-body. Rather, the disfigured or disabled individual – the "living dead" as one victim of facial trauma describes herself – sits somewhere in between, in a liminal phase that separates the "unabridged" and the "dismembered", the "living" and the "dead", the "face" and the "non-face", the "body" and the "non-body", the "human" and the "non-human" (Bouchard 2017:126).

2.1.6 Creating a Counter-Narrative

Burkean philosophy insists "that humans tell stories and also that humans are storied" (Burke in Harter, Scott, Novak, Leeman & Morris 2006:6). Recalling my mention of the notion of not merely "*re-storying*", but more importantly *restoring* – embracing, affirming and empowering – the body, the former unquestionably aids in achieving the latter. This idea relates to the concept of narrative. The dominant narrative of people with disfigurement and disability is severely problematic not only in that it is constructed from a "normative" (able-bodied and non-disfigured) perspective, but moreover that it renders those with disfigurement and disability visible and deviant, diminishes their identities and experiences, and associates them with countless derogatory and detrimental myths and stereotypes. Emily Hayden and Angela Prince (2020:2) remark the restrictions and inequality that a dominant "normative" perspective, by upholding such biases and myths,

enables. Dominant representations of difference suppress any other narrative or understanding that does not comply with their respective beliefs, which includes ableist thinking and two-dimensional societal expectations of normality. In other words, the voice of those who are represented, is denied (Fudge Schormans 2011:304). Fudge Schormans (2011:311) points out the ways in which such representations distance the self (viewer) from the other (subject), disadvantaging both groups, and proving detrimental to the restoration of those who are stigmatised, discriminated and segregated. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2007:113) explains the critical danger of ableist representations of disability in enabling the belief that "the configuration and function of our human body determines our narrative identity, the sense of who we are to ourselves and others".

One of the many issues regarding representation raised by Derrida (1998:8), questions: "[w]ho has the right to invoke narratives?". As numerous scholars have established, most of the representations of people with disfigurement and disability are produced and governed by biased ideologies, such as ableism. A counter-narrative is a set of "histories, anecdotes, and other fragments" that collectively work to disintegrate and overthrow those dominant narratives that are, often deliberately, inaccurate and harmful – excluding, marginalising, stigmatising and discriminating against people with difference (Harter *et al* 2006:6). It is 1) an act of resistance against either the absence of a recognised identity *or* the generation and preservation of "an oppressive identity" and, in turn, 2) an effort to generate and preserve instead a different respectful and affirmative identity (Harter *et al* 2006:6).

Over the centuries, these representations have negatively impacted those who have disabilities or disfigurement, to a certain extent due to the fact that these portrayals have not been controlled by those individuals themselves, but instead by the dominant, nondisabled population (Couser 2005:603). To critique image and narrative, says Garland-Thomson (2005:523), is to critique elements of representation. It is important to remind oneself that representation is not a reflection of reality, but rather a construction thereof. Subsequently, disability can be described as a story that is told about bodies – this said, it is an unfixed and continuously changing story dependent on time and place (Garland-Thomson 2005:523). Hayden and Prince (2020) propose a different perspective

which they believe can afford agency to people with disabilities. This perspective takes a strengths-based approach towards such people, considering them each with regards to their individual abilities and capacities. This view, concentrating "on opportunities to grow, develop, and thrive in personal development, interpersonal relations, social inclusion, and emotional and physical wellbeing" in various spaces, releases people with disabilities from exclusion and marginalisation (Hayden & Prince 2020:3). Opposing the ideological stance of ableism, "strengths-based representations of people with disability" recognise an individual as a whole – his/her disability thus represents merely one *part* of the person, rather than *defining* the person (Buntinx in Hayden & Prince 2020:6). This view allows people with disabilities to be seen in the same way able-bodied people are seen – not determined, defined or reduced by one aspect of body or life (Hayden & Prince 2020:6). A strengths-based view therefore provides an opportunity to generate a counter-narrative(s) of disability.

Disability scholars' efforts to challenge dominant representations of disability, aim to expose those representations as exclusive and oppressive – unveiling their false generation of what is considered "the natural … order of things" (Garland-Thomson 2005:523). Accordingly, and like other scholars, Garland-Thomson (2005:523) provides examples of re-imaginations of disability through a different representation thereof, hoping to illustrate the contributions of those with disabilities themselves. Such a reconsideration and re-imagination of difference 1) exposes disability and disfigurement "as a significant human experience", 2) aids in the acceptance of the magnitude of this fact, and 3) integrates disability and disfigurement "into our knowledge of human experience and history" and culture (Garland-Thomson 2005:524). Underscoring the importance of self-representation, Couser (2005:604) calls for an autobiographical approach – a response to misrepresentations, rather than a spontaneous expression of self. This idea relates to Harter *et al's* description of self-representation as an act of resistance against dominant ideology. An autobiographical approach allows for the construction of identity from within and from personal experience, in turn functioning as a self-representation of, and a revaluation of understandings of, disability and disfigurement. Through this form of representation, the object becomes the subject and those with

difference are given the opportunity to defy common (mis)perceptions of them by confirming their identities, realities and experiences (Couser 2005:605).

2.3 Ballet

The second part of this literature review, exploration and interpretation focuses on dance, in particular the genre of ballet. I wish to tie together body and ballet by interlacing the theories discussed in both these sections in formulating this dissertation's main arguments. I start this section, which serves to consider dance – specifically ballet – in close proximity to disfigurement and disability, by introducing dance as proposed through the lens of Hanna's work. The disfigured or disabled body is placed in opposition to the body-in-control. Hanna's theory poses a possibility of repositioning the disfigured or disabled body in ballet, in a way that 1) offers this body the element of control and 2) unites dance, disability and disfigurement through the notion of restoration.

Dance is very broad term that can and has been used to describe various types of movement in various contexts. For the purpose of my arguments, I use the term to describe what scholars such as Hanna (1995:323) define as human behaviour that is "purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of nonverbal body movement other than ordinary motor activities". Music often accompanies dance, she adds, and acting (role-play and/or pantomime) is also a common feature of dance. Offering the experience – both for the spectator and the dancer – of enchantment through multiple senses, dance draws on and presents elements of "sight, sound, touch, smell and kinaesthetic feeling" (Hanna 1995:323). Dance can be a more powerful means of self-expression than verbal or textual conducts, argues Hanna (1995:323-324).

2.2.1 Ballet or Dance? Ballet as Dance

Given the extents of various definitions of dance, I recognise that it exists in many cultures and contexts – this existence, depending on various elements, determines the meaning behind a style of dance. Dance is engaged with for countless reasons, by various groups and cultures, in different circumstances, holding different meanings and purposes. It would thus seem naïve and unproductive to conduct a critical analysis of my subjects within such a broad context of dance.

I referred to Segal's *Five Things I Hate About Ballet* (2006) in Chapter One. *Dance Magazine* published an article in 2007, featuring responses to "ballet bashing" from directors, choreographers, dancers and others involved in the ballet world of today. Ethan Stiefel, Principal dancer with the American Ballet Theatre, acknowledges the evolution of ballet technique (Dance Magazine 2007). Alonzo King, Artistic Director and choreographer with LINES Ballet, defines ballet not as a "style", but as a "language and a science, a systematically [organised] body of knowledge of movement" (Dance Magazine 2007). Importantly, he argues that this language is unique due to the countless ways through which one can explore and investigate it (Dance Magazine 2007). Petel Boal, Artistic Director with the Pacific Northwest Ballet, expresses his dislike for preconceptions about what constitutes ballet. He instead urges the public to adopt a fresh stance on the art form and realise that it is "current, relevant, fascinating, and thought provoking" (Dance Magazine 2007). In agreement with Boal, Dana Caspersen, dancer and choreographer at The Forsythe Company, claims that "it is a mistake to think we already know what ballet is" (Dance Magazine 2007). She stresses that ballet is not complete, but ever-changing along with its people.

All disabilities are not identical or equal. Likewise, dances engaging with performers with disabilities are not identical or equal. Yvette Hutchison (2018:76) refers to Albright, arguing that:

> some replicate 'the representational frames of traditional proscenium performances, [emphasising] the elements of virtuosity and technical expertise to reaffirm a classical body in spite of its limitations', while others 'work to break down the distinctions between the classical and the grotesque body, radically restructuring traditional ways of seeing dancers'.

The subjects of my case studies are young adults who are self-identified ballet dancers. Although the style of dance executed in the visual examples can at times be argued to resemble dance styles other than ballet, it does to various extents, comply to a progressive definition of ballet. The styles of contemporary dance and modern dance, for instance, make much use of the basic principles and technique of ballet. In other words, ballet can be seen as the foundation of such styles, even if they endeavour to contest the traditions of ballet. According to Petra Kuppers (2000:122), despite the popularity of contemporary dance styles, ballet nevertheless emerges "as the main cultural image of dance in Western

culture". She mentions a number of organisations that remain ballet-based, but challenge the traditional narrative thereof. Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels represents such an organisation, by producing and promoting "a new dancerly body"[8] (Kuppers 2000:126). DePrince identifies as, and is best known by the career title "American ballet dancer". Her inspiration for becoming a ballerina lies in a ballet magazine (*Dance Magazine*) that she found as a young child – this moment, discussed in Chapter Three, is seen as the commencement of her ballet journey. Although the style of her dancing in the films that I analyse is open to interpretation, the foundation of her dancing and the story she tells through it, can be understood in the context of ballet. Moreover, in one of the two films that I consider in the section on DePrince, she performs *en pointe* (executing movements on the tips of her toes, making use of pointe shoes), an aspect exclusively associated with the style of ballet. Her dancing may present movements similar to contemporary dance, however, the dance can (and should) rather be categorised as neo-classical[9] or modern ballet.

Perhaps due to physical limitations, such as in Powell-Main's case, his style of dancing may be criticised as non-ballet. As a child, Powell-Main was a classical ballet dancer training with the Royal Ballet School, with the ultimate goal of dancing professionally with the company (he has danced with the company in minor roles as a child). He engaged with ballet until he acquired his injury/ies. Arguably, due to physical limitations, his movements do not always resemble typical movements associated with (classical) ballet. Yet, this can and should not simply disqualify his dancing as not being ballet. Furthermore, Powell-Main's collaboration with the Royal Ballet Company in one of the performances that I analyse in Chapter Three further defends his career as a ballet dancer.

[8] Kuppers (2000:119) uses the term "dancerly body" to describe naturalised beliefs regarding physical requirements in dance. Disability is capable of disrupting these beliefs and expectations, instead providing new ways in which to conceptualise the body in dance (Kuppers 2000:119).

[9] Mikko Nissinen, Artistic Director with Boston Ballet, bluntly distinguishes between classical and neo-classical ballet by claiming that the former hihglights "prettiness" (Dance Magazine 2007). Offering an example of a neo-classical work, Nissinen states: "Balanchine's *Agon* is not a "pretty" ballet" (Dance Magazine 2007).

Similarly, for the purposes of this dissertation, Freefall Dance Company's collaboration with Birmingham Royal Ballet justifies its place in the ballet world. Once again, the Freefall dancers' movements may not always fit *just* into the genre of ballet (at times also reminiscent of other dance styles), but this is arguably again due to certain limitations that do not allow them to, for instance, dance safely and successfully *en pointe* or perform complex *pas de deux* choreography that makes up the traditional ballet repertoire. Ballet technique, however, shapes an important part of these dancers' training and performance, which can be seen in the analyses of Chapter Four.

All three case studies, in the light of the arguments I wish to prove, can therefore be associated with the genre of ballet. I consider these subjects in depth in Chapters Three and Four. It must be recognised that ballet has indeed evolved over the centuries. Supporting a malleable and evolving definition of ballet, King states that "[n]othing as profoundly universal as classical ballet could be rooted in the "customs" of a particular culture or limited to one specific look or way of moving" (Dance Magazine 2007). He recognises the work of well-known choreographers, like Mikhail Fokine and George Balanchine, who he claims have not abandoned the art of ballet, but rather reinvigorated it (Dance Magazine 2007). Petra Kuppers proves a similar point when she considers the relationship between the dancer with disability and the (stereotypical) ballet body, thereby challenging our understanding of the body. She argues that physical and cognitive impairments rupture and dislocate conventional ideas about dance technique and challenge "audiences to [re-conceptualise] dancing bodies" (Kuppers 2000:119). Kuppers (2000:126) recognises the possibilities for empowering persons with disabilities (and disfigurement) in the ballet world, stating that, by insisting "on difference as a positive element of choreography", aesthetic beliefs regarding the art form can be re-imagined. This process, she says, opens up "exciting avenues" in the ballet world (Kuppers 2000:126).

When considering the arguments and findings of this dissertation, one must therefore be cautious of a narrow-minded perspective that isolates ballet within a certain era or phase of development, for this proves insufficient in establishing a restorative path for the art form and those bodies that engage with it. This is indeed what I wish to accomplish: a

broader acceptance and understanding of ballet as embracing bodily difference, even limitations. In my analyses I refer both to ballet and dance. I do so to remain cognisant of the original motivations and contexts of the theories put forth by my sources. I also do so to show that this dissertation's proposed multidimensional framework can be applied not merely to ballet, but to other dance styles as well. For example, Hanna's theories regarding dance are not specifically concerned with ballet, because not all dance is ballet. Yet, because the opposite is true – all ballet is dance – I argue that her theory can apply to the style of ballet. The dance style at the centre of my analyses is thus ballet. However, given that Hanna does not specifically refer to ballet, but to dance in general, other styles and contexts of dance can also be considered through the framework that I establish in this dissertation. I return to this discussion in a later section of this Chapter, in which I consider different genres of dance that engage with disability and the South African context for integrated/inclusive dance.

2.2.2 Body in Control

Sarah Whatley (2007) considers the element of *control*, arguing that ballet has traditionally emphasised a certain control over one's body. Such control has commonly been deemed essential in order to achieve the celebrated visual appeal and brilliance of ballet (Whatley 2007:5). The disabled body has been shown to stand opposed to the body-in-control. Hanna's identification of (at least) four opportunities through which dance can offer control counters this universal belief. Whereas bodies that are disabled and disfigured are commonly seen as out-of-control, Hanna (1995) demonstrates how dancing can prove precisely the opposite. She labels four opportunities through which dancing offers control: (1) possession by the spiritual in dance, (2) mastery of movement, (3) escape or diversion from stress and pain through changes in emotion, states of consciousness, and/or physical capability/ies, and (4) confronting stressors to work through ways of handling their effects (Hanna 1995:323-326).

2.2.3 Dimensions of Dance

As argued earlier, the body and its demeanour exist beyond a visible dimension. In other words, the human body cannot simply be considered in its literal sense – that is, taking into account purely its physicality. It is indeed essential to also acknowledge and assess

the emotional, psychological and symbolic aspects of the body. In doing so, we are permitted to view the body as interconnected with the social, bodily and artistic issues that are to be dealt with in this study (Albright 1997:84). Echoing the ideas of bodily multidimensionality as discussed in the first section of this chapter, Hanna (1995) recognises – although arguably inspired by a slightly different angle – a similar multidimensionality in dance. Underscoring the involvement of body, emotion and mind in the practice of dance, these three constituents are not merely biological, but also (and importantly) cultural (Hanna 1995:324). Simply put, the way(s) in which these three elements are perceived, is shaped and determined by culture. It is worth noting that pain is also read through a fusion of these elements within a cultural frame (Hanna 1995:324).

A concise description of Hanna's five primary dimensions of dance is as follows. The first dimension is concerned with the physical *body* and how energy is released through muscular-skeletal functioning. Hanna (1995:324) then turns to and acknowledges an *emotional* dimension, where the subjective experience and feeling either by observing or partaking in dance are considered. There is also a *cognitive* dimension that deals with mental activities – for instance memory, imagery, perception and attention. Through the cognitive dimension, the significance of dance moves beyond movement, both by involving and communicating thought and feeling (Hanna 1995:324). The fourth dimension considers *cultural* elements, such as shared principles that are learned and communicated within dance (Hanna 1995:324). People dance, among other purposes, because it offers pleasure, relieves stress, mastering skills, responding to social pressure and partaking in emotional experiences individually or collectively. The act of performing dance can be considered a form of self-support (Hanna 1995:325). An individual who is excluded and alienated from society – and by extension, from him/herself – due to abnormality, can be freed from such negative experience through dance. This is possible through a fifth dimension of dance pointed out by Hanna (1995:325), which is concerned with *religious* elements. Allowing "altered states of consciousness and … metaphysical-physical experience", dance can offer a sense of inclusion and (re-)identification (Hanna 1995:325).

2.2.4 The Multidimensionality of Body and Dance

The arts unite body, speech, mind and spirit, functioning in what Ilene Serlin (2020:177) calls a Whole Person context. Addressing the multidimensionality of body and dance, she demonstrates that art is capable of healing on numerous levels: reducing stress; improving physical and emotional health; improving one's thinking, communication and problem solving; expanding one's state(s) of consciousness; transcending one into a ritual and sacred realm; "facilitating creativity, compassion and connectedness"; aiding in one's discovery of personal strengths (Serlin 2020:177). These capabilities of art, including the art of dance, evidently link to the multiple dimensions of the body and the connectedness of this body to the art of dance (along with its multiple dimensions). I seek to draw potential connections between Hanna's dimensions of dance and the dimensions of the body based on Grabher and supplementary scholars, in the pursuit of building and conducting my analyses on their critical perspectives of ballet and body. Hanna and Grabher propose dimensions on two separate subjects – Hanna proposes five dimensions of dance whereas Grabher categorises only three dimensions regarding the body, and these dimensions are labelled somewhat differently. However, I believe a proximity and interrelation between the two frameworks can be established.

The first bodily dimension, identified as the primary, superficial, first layer of a body (Grabher 2016:131), can be linked with Hanna's first dimension of dance, which is concerned with the emission of energy through the physical functioning of the *body* (Hanna 1995:324). Both these first dimensions regard the physicality of the body as a vehicle for movement, communication and other physical or tangible activities. This is a dimension which is predominantly visual and which often relates to outward appearance or the body's exterior.

The second bodily dimension, described by Grabher (2016:131) as an intermediary, moveable layer, can be linked with Hanna's cognitive and cultural dimensions of dance. The cognitive dimension regards processes of communicating thought and feelings, and is thus cognisant of psychological aspects (Hanna 1995:324).

Grabher's third dimension of the body can be linked with Hanna's emotional and religious dimensions of dance. The third bodily dimension represents an individual and their identity. Moving beyond the physical and the visual, this dimension allows for a thorough understanding of an individual beyond corporeality (Grabher 2016:131). Hanna's emotional dimension of dance recognises personal experience and thus also occupies a place beyond corporeality. Similarly, the religious or spiritual dimension of dance digs deeper than physicality, considering an individual's identities, their meta-physical experiences and relating to that which lies external to human perception (Hanna 1995:325). Acknowledging the person as a whole, Serlin's (2020:177) study shows that a path towards "the religious and spiritual dimensions of human nature and human fate" opens up through art.

Dance ethnography, specifically through Sklar's (2000:71) contention that the "body can be transformed by the experience" of "the felt dimensions of movement", aligns with Hanna's identification of multidimensionality in dance and its internal relationship with the body. Dance, as an art form, is capable of healing through transcending an individual or a group of individuals Serlin 2020:177). Also speaking to the multidimensionality of the body, Serlin (2020:178) claims that art, through allowing for rediscovery, allows for self-recreation. This recreation of self does not imply a reconstruction of the physical body, but instead of the third dimension. Accepting body and dance as multidimensional, and by connecting these dimensions as above, may open up the possibility for restoration of body and ballet. Building on the multidimensionality of body and dance, it is possible to devise a new perspective on disfigurement, disability and ballet. I start building this restorative perspective by introducing ideas that challenge ableist ideologies in the art world, promoting artists with disabilities, and I am hopeful in applying such thinking to include artists with disfigurement as well.

2.2.5 Challenging Ableism through Art

Eisenhauer (2007:9) distinguishes between the terms "disabled people doing art" and "disability artists". The former, she argues, is concerned with representing, admiring and appreciating difference. On the other hand, and more importantly, disability artists participate in a critical socio-political practice that interrogates constructions of disability

and ableist ideology (Eisenhauer 2007:9). Such individuals encourage reconsideration of disability discourse and beliefs, particularly in the world of art, and positions art as instrumental in addressing problematic social systems that include ableist beliefs (Eisenhauer 2007:10). Problematic social models and conventions regarding "disability culture and representation" have not received adequate scrutiny and interrogation in relation to other marginalised groups in the field of art (Eisenhauer 2007:20). Eisenhauer (2007:20) stresses the need to re-orientate discourse that deals with disability in the arts, in order to achieve sufficient integration of different models that serve to address ableism. She believes that such an approach is capable of changing the space of the studio or class, to resist ideologies that discriminate, stigmatise and marginalise individuals with disabilities (Eisenhauer 2007:20). While the focus here is on challenging ableist ideology can principally concerned with disability, I believe that similar efforts are necessary in the inclusion of persons with disfigurement in the same spaces. Thus, I will employ Eisenhauer's philosophy to not only speak to disability versus ableism in the arts (specifically ballet), but additionally to handle similar issues regarding the disfigured dancer.

2.2.6 A New Perspective on Ballet and Difference

People with difference often feel that they are seen as insufficient and burdensome (Collins *et al* 2022:320). These individuals, such as those with disabilities and disfigurement, are perceived as disobedient towards societal standards and observations of their difference are commonly accompanied by pity and/or repulsion. In changing such predisposed views, it is crucial to elevate the artist above their difference (Collins *et al* 2022:320). The arts produce opportunities for independence by way of "increasing physical capabilities, education and training" (Collins *et al* 2022:321). Collins *et al* (2022:321) note the importance of recognising these potentials of art beyond that of therapy and leisure. It is equally important to regard an individual's art, rather than their difference, as integral to their identity, which is produced through performance (Collins *et al* 2022:321).

Sally Sevey Fitt (in Dixon 2005:76) insists on the mutual importance of the science behind bodily movement and the art of dance. It is through the employment of this notion

that we can open and explore a link between mind and body in the practice of ballet. A reconsideration of the traditions on which ballet is founded is essential, but also embraced, in the community of dance/dancers (Brinson & Dick in Dixon 2005:76). Emma Dixon (2005:76) makes reference to Maria Fay (1990) and Richard Glasstone (1977), who welcome new and different approaches to the art form. The inclination to connect the mind to the body was introduced at the dawn of the 20th century, along with many other significant changes in thought and reasoning, such as the need to determine the roots of dance (Dixon 2005:77). The results included innovative philosophies surrounding ballet, encouraging investigation of the science in movement within the younger generation of scholars (Dixon 2005:77). A connection between these endeavours and somaesthetics can be realised in considering that somaesthetic awareness leads to "a deeper sense of self-knowledge" (mind) through the practice of dance (body) (Bailey 2021:120). Devon Bailey (2021:21) expands on Shusterman's theory by demonstrating the ways in which dance can cultivate self-discovery, self-knowledge and new somaesthetic experience(s). Although Bailey (2021:21) considers the context of the South African female breakdancer, her research points to issues that are arguably equally relevant when considering the topic of ballet. These issues include "[p]erceived inadequacies … and challenges posed by stereotypical treatment" (Bailey 2021:21). A somaesthetic approach opens up opportunities to battle these issues through a transformative aesthetic experience of a given dance style. This occurs through the transformation of self-perception and self-knowledge, which allows for a transcendence of harmful perceptions (Bailey 2021:21).

Julia Buckroyd's (in Dixon 2009) work relates to the idea of the mind and body association. She argues that our psychological and physical perception of self cannot be separated. It is but through this very entanglement of mind and body, within an embodied individual, that one can thoroughly function. Thus what we need, she says, is a method of teaching that relies not so much on training the body, but instead grants emotional and psychological progress (Buckroyd in Dixon 2009:85). Underscoring the fruitful possibilities of ballet, Nancy Topf (in Dixon 2009:85) argues that it is through dance that we can (re)discover feeling. Dixon also speaks of an emotional centre, in addition to the physical centre so often referred to in dance, identifying it as the source of all movement (in dance) (Dixon 2009:93-94).

As noted earlier, Kleinman (in Hanna 1995:326) marks a distinction between a bodily or health condition and the personal *experience* of this condition. Physical pain and suffering may be induced by the condition itself, however, individuals also experience socio-psychological pain and suffering (Kleinman in Hanna 1995:326). This is largely due to the many powerful, but detrimental, ideologies that continue to govern social and cultural attitudes towards bodies – in particular, those bodies who are seen as different. Continued negative outlooks on and consequences for atypicality in bodies, such as disfigurement and disability, mean continued devastating living standards for such individuals through social and cultural rejection, exclusion and oppression. Through multidimensional and somaesthetic analysis, I believe these social consequences can be overcome. A somaesthetic approach deals with the human capacity "to explore, accept, and allow for a pluralism of human expressions" (Anderson 2021:125). Shusterman is very aware of representational and aesthetic ideologies of beauty which place value on bodily activates primarily for their externalised ends. Anderson (2021:143) gives an example of this by pointing to weight-loss as an individual's motivation for physical activity. In this instance, the physical activity "is pursued as a means to an end of a certain body shape" instead of a "medium for cultivating a deeper awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and body sensations" (Anderson 2021:143). Considering the notion of multidimensionality, it is clear that such ideological thinking and doing neglects the deeper levels of experience and connection found between dancer and dance. Taking into account the subjective experience of the dancer through his/her engagement with dance activities, instead of aesthetic and visual ideals, allows for the development of inner somatic experience (Anderson 2021:146). In Shusterman's (in Anderson 2021:146) own words:

> Rather than focusing on how one's body looks to others and trying to make it conform to external stereotypes of beauty that seem designed to exercise power over us, experiential somaesthetics concentrates on examining and improving one's own inner somatic experience.

Following Shusterman (in Anderson 2021:155), I am critical of the modern social fixation on beauty, leading to a (negative type of) body consciousness, that demands people to sculpt, alter or shape their bodies in order to be considered as such. Conforming to dominant ideals and standards deprives us of the opportunity to appreciate aesthetic diversity of (other) bodies (Anderson 2021:155). In response to this narrow, and certainly

inadequate, perspective on the body, Shusterman (in Anderson 2021:161) disapproves of society's aesthetic norms and fixation on the external body (appearance). As evident by now, I position this perspective within a multidimensional framework. Superficially, ballet can be seen to promote oppressive societal norms that regard the body's appearance. However, scholars such as Anderson (2021:168) that rely on a somaesthetic perspective, acknowledge the need to dig into the dimensions of ballet through multiple entry points in order to fully interpret and understand it. In questioning assumptions about ballet, it is shown not to be at fault for rigid and often extreme aesthetic expectations (Anderson 2021:169). Like Anderson (2021:148), I seek to expand perspectives on the genre of ballet. While Anderson (2021:148) admits her initial hesitance to associate with ballet due to the dominance of aesthetic ideals, by adopting a somaesthetic perspective on the art form, she has (re-)gained an appreciation for ballet by considering its values within its deeper dimensions. Anderson (2021:148) states:

> The idea from somaesthetics that we can value representational expressions of body aesthetics makes sense to me because of how much I appreciate what ballet culture taught me when it comes to the aesthetic value of grace. As I develop my sense of self, I can see how ballet influenced my investment in how I carry my body, the role of fashion in self-fashion, as well as the empowerment that can be felt in styling one's hair or the use of makeup.

These instances of empowerment pointed out by Anderson (2021:148) associate with ballet's and the body's multidimensionality. Terms such as "sense of self" indicate experience beyond the visual, that deals with one's emotional and cognitive, even spiritual, dimensions. In the analyses that follow (Chapters Three and Four), I wish to analyse more closely the ways in which ballet is capable of relieving negative feelings and experience, and in doing so motivates restoration and repair. One of the ways in which this can be achieved is through the performance of ballet. I now explore theories that consider bodily difference in the field of performing arts, specifically looking into the performance of ballet and the potential power that it holds for individuals with disfigurement and/or disability.

2.2.7 The Power of Performance

An ethnographic South African study by Le Roux *et al* (2021) on the inclusion of young people with disabilities in the performing arts speaks to the experience(s) of, as well as exposure and opportunity/ies for these individuals. The study argues that, through influencing and translating opinions, values and experiences in time and space, art shapes society (le Roux *et al* 2021:2). Participation in the performing arts offers people with disabilities "a space for expression [while creating] images of pride and strength", opposing prevalent perceptions that associate such individuals with fragility, weakness and dependency (le Roux *et al* 2021:2). I, once again, wish to apply these ideas not only to individuals with disabilities in the ballet world, but to extend the argument so as to include dancers with disfigurement as well.

Exposing an important distinction between ballet training and performance, Sibyl Kleiner (2009:236-237) argues that we lose our sense of self-consciousness when we step on stage. She remarks thus a distinction between the space of the studio and the space of the stage. Within the studio, one is "individually exposed", "highly visible" and "constantly observed" (Kleiner 2009:244). The presence of mirrors heightens the vulnerability of a dancer in such an environment where the focus is on discipline, instruction and training (Kleiner 2009:244). The embodiment of ballet occurs during such training, and the performance thereof, free from reflexivity, follows. This distinction between ballet training in the studio and ballet performance on stage is amplified in analysing the space of the stage. The environment in which performance takes place is constructed in such a way to encourage expression and artistic enactment – in turn, allowing a loss of self-consciousness (Kleiner 2009:250).

Kleiner (2009:251) considers the experience of performing ballet as "a goal, a reward … a release from purely critical scrutiny". Without ignoring the fact that these bodies are still put on display within this space, she argues that this "rare opportunity to evoke pleasure" outweighs typical criticism found within the audience (Kleiner 2009:251). Such criticism is largely based on high expectations of certain physical and aesthetic qualities, which I argue are not products of the art of ballet, but rather of the social standards and ideological beliefs associated with the art form. A criticising gaze is therefore prevalent

within the spectators of ballet. This is a particularly important point that supports an optimistic perspective on ballet – one that not only considers the surveillance of bodies, but also emphasises the artistic and expressive, fulfilling and constructive elements of ballet. In this view, the spectator receives and validates ballet in its essence which results in a thrilling and exciting experience for the dancer (Kleiner 2009:251). Instead of a self-conscious reflection of the self that is concerned with physical improvement, the dancer on stage is concerned only with the performance and the experience thereof. Furthermore, in terms of structure, the mirror, the instructor and subsequent interruption of choreography are all absent in the space of the stage (Kleiner 2009:251). Exclusion of the mirror in the space of the stage also results in a disappearance of visual differences between bodies (Kleiner 2009:251).

Given the countless academic opinions about severe self-consciousness believed to stem from the engagement with ballet, Kleiner's suggestions may indeed seem surprising. However, her argument is skilfully explored and substantiated. While it may be claimed that Kleiner's focus is on the professional dancer that is physically competent in their training of ballet, I believe that the essence of her assertion – namely, the contrast between studio/training and stage/performance – can be effectively applied in the process of destigmatising ballet and body. It is necessary to decipher Kleiner's theory regarding the stage in order to effectively construct the analyses that are to be conducted in ensuing chapters. The absence of the mirror on stage results in an interruption of detecting visual bodily difference, says Kleiner (2009:251). Perhaps, this comment falls short in its vagueness. Thus, for the purpose of this study, let us confine it to consider the perspective of the self – for, while it may be argued that visual difference could still be detected by audience members, the dancer on stage in this moment is freed from such an experience. In other words, by removing the mirror on stage, the dancer does not perceive him/herself as different in any way. Within this space, Kleiner (2009:251) says, the dancer can take responsibility for his/her performance. Relating to the experience of performance as considered by Kleiner (2009), Sklar's (2000:72) study on dance ethnography proves a loss of awareness within subjects through experiencing movement through a "doubled act of moving and feeling oneself moving". Sklar (2000:72) refers to this somatic experience, as one's "ultimate intimacy". George Herbert Mead's (in Kleiner 2009:253) theories

around self-awareness supports this same perspective on performing ballet. He argues that "it is possible for the individual to experience and be conscious of his body, and of bodily sensations, without being conscious or aware of himself – without, in other words, taking the attitude of the other toward himself".

2.2.8 Dance, Access & Inclusion

My exploration of literature on the potentials of performing art – specifically ballet – and possible construction of a framework through which to restore both ballet and body, still proves the shortage of research that focuses positively on ballet as a capable vehicle for change. An exception is *Dance, Access and Inclusion: Perspectives on Dance, Young People and Change* (2018) which contributes enormously to the empowerment of (young) persons with special needs by recognising the power that art, specifically dance, holds (Burridge & Svendler Nielson 2018). Subjects that are dealt with by the contributors to this volume include research, studies and active work on inclusive pedagogy, community projects, as well as professional dance and choreography (Burridge & Svenlder Nielson 2018). As the title of the book indicates, there is a focus on the "access and inclusion" to the dance world for young individuals who have been excluded due to their difference (focus specifically on mental disabilities) (Burridge & Svendler Nielson 2018). The studies conducted by the authors of the book provide a pivotal point in dance for young individuals with special needs as well as the ultimate setting(s) and condition(s) for dance, whether it be professional, educational or communal (Burridge & Svendler Nielson 2018). These studies are among the few that consider dance in its potential to encourage "creative expression, freedom and hope" for those who have been stigmatised, oppressed, rejected and marginalised (Burridge & Svendler Nielson 2018). Inclusivity in dance pedagogy is a key theme in the book, embracing individuals from diverse backgrounds in educational dance settings where they are treated equally. Some of the studies explore well known choreographers' attempts to actively inspire artistry, creativity and expression by including individuals from diverse backgrounds (Burridge & Svendler Nielson 2018). The book can be seen as one of the crucial starting points in changing interpretations of dance, demonstrating its potential success as a vehicle for empowerment. Perspectives are shared among multiple authors from across the world, including South Africa (Burridge & Svendler Nielson 2018).

2.2.9 Therapeutic Dance, Competitive Dance and Inclusion Beyond Ballet

While this dissertation seeks to validate the impact and potential of ballet beyond therapy and recreation, it is not my intention to belittle or disregard the benefits of dance within a therapeutic or recreational environment. Whether dance is pursued for the purpose of therapy or in the pursuit of entering the professional or competitive world of performance, those who engage with the art form are awarded the opportunity to self-express and nurture self-growth, self-acceptance and confidence. In addition, dance provides individuals with physical, cognitive and emotional benefits. In this section, I discuss the work of Serap Inal (2014), who considers dance as a therapeutic activity, recreational or communal activity, as well as an ambitious endeavour of those who take the art form seriously and who aspire to compete or perform professionally. This section also considers dance beyond the genre of ballet in order to establish the relevance of a multidimensional approach in the wider context of dance (as well as other performing arts).

Inal (2014:35) speaks both to physical and cognitive disabilities in her discussion on inclusive competitive dance. Dance as "a therapeutic recreative modality" has developed since the early 1900's near the end of the second World War. Wheelchair dancing dates back to the late 1960's, pioneered by Hilde Holger, who had a son with Down syndrome (Inal 2014:33). This endeavour has grown to include not only therapeutic dance activities, but also both "national and international competitions and championships" as well as professional companies pursuing and practicing various genres of dance (Inal 2014:33). Ballet, modern dance, jazz, Latin-American and ballroom dancing are popular among these genres (Inal 2014:33). Whether dance is pursued therapeutically, recreationally or competitively, Inal (2014:36) believes that movement along with music, space and time holds cognitive and emotional benefits for an individual. This idea also relates to the dimensionality of dance, addressing the cognitive impacts and emotional impacts of dance on the body. Importantly, it is necessary to be reminded that "dance in its purest form is art first and sport second" (Inal 2014:33).

Although therapeutic dancing is therefore very relevant and beneficial to anyone, including individuals with disfigurement or disability, the inclusion of these individuals

in the art form cannot be limited to medical or remedial conditions. Addressing the importance of including individuals with bodily difference in the art of dance, Micheline Mason (1992:27) remarks the degradation of those individuals: "[o]ther children play, but you do therapy … [o]ther children develop but you are 'trained'". Reinforcing a pitiful, victimising gaze onto persons with disability or disfigurement, this statement is useful to my intentional focus on dance beyond therapy or recreation.

In addition to the consideration of dance in therapeutic, recreational and competitive settings, it is also worth considering dance beyond the genre of ballet, and to open this dissertation's multidimensional approach to include and apply to any dance style. I focus specifically on ballet for, compared to other dance styles, it is particularly positioned in a negative light in academic discourse, associated with health problems and exclusionary practice, and glued to many traditional and ideological beliefs that condemn its practice.

While critical of the "strict conventions" attached to dance, Leslie Swartz, Jason Bantjes and Faine Bissett's (2018:1089) reflection on ballroom dancing in a South African context establishes positive experiences of dancers with visual impairment. Like Swartz *et al* (2018), I do not wish to deny the benefits of medical or therapeutic intervention aimed at those who are disabled or disfigured. Importantly, they stress that such intervention is only beneficial where appropriate. Nevertheless, true and thorough inclusion is only possible by allowing individuals with difference to engage in dance under circumstances that do not medicalise the art (Swartz, Bantjes & Bissett 2018:1092). Swartz *et al's* (2018:1093) study finds that visually impaired individuals positively experience inclusive ballroom dancing. The study also remarked a joy among dancers to have the freedom to self-express despite the demands of ballroom dancing and performance (Swartz *et al* 2018:1094). Based on the usage of terms such as "helpful", "interesting" and unconstricting, the conventions Swartz *et al* (2018:1097) are concerned with were in fact positively experienced by participants.

Noting the diversity in dance styles that are accessible to people with disabilities, Inal (2014:33) mentions their participation in ballroom, "classical, ballet, modern dance, ethnic/folk dance, and traditional dances". Her study considers the various categories in

the Paralympic Committee Wheelchair Dance. Other dance companies that prove relevant beyond the genre of ballet include Candoco Dance Company and Stopgap Dance Company. Dancers that prove relevant beyond the genre of ballet include Ann Cooper Albright, David Toole and, one of my three subjects of analysis (to be considered in Chapter Three), Powell-Main. Both the company Stopgap Dance Company and dancer Albright (a disabled dancer and scholar) are known for their performance of a style called contact improvisation[10]. Powell-Main, to be analysed in depth in the next chapter, re-entered into the dance world as a wheelchair dancer participating in Latin-American and ballroom dance classes, later also pursuing these styles competitively. These dance styles can prove relevant and significant to a multidimensional framework on the body, in particular the disfigured or disabled body, and dance.

2.2.10. Integrated and Inclusive Dance in South Africa

I share Hutchison's (2018:73) excitement around South Africa's advancement in disability-inclusive dance. Hutchison (2018) dates inclusive dance in South Africa back to the 1990's. Soweto-based, non-profit organisation *Lean On Dance*, caters for the younger generation and, while largely focused on celebrating African culture, includes youth with disabilities. The ballroom genre in South Africa is particularly inclusive of disabilities (Hutchison 2018:73). Circle of Dance Academy, based in the Western Cape, caters for persons with cognitive disabilities, visual and auditory impairments, wheelchair-users and paraplegics (Hutchison 2018:73). The academy operates in the recreational and professional field of Latin American and social dance, ballroom and dancesport (Hutchison 2018:73). Initially called Remix and celebrating the work of Adam Benjamin, Unmute Dance Company (based in Cape Town) is known for uniting performers with various disabilities on the stage and "develop integrated dance locally" (Hutchison 2018:75). Other significant examples of disability-inclusive endeavours in the

[10] Founded by Steve Paxton, this style of dance emerged along with modernism, in the 1900s (Novack 1990:22). It can therefore be seen as a modern dance form. Although having developed and grown in various directions from then, contact improvisation, like modern dance, is largely built on experimental movements (Novack 1990:23). Choreography is not deemed "conceptual, conscious [or] intentional", but rather results spontaneously or accidently from "the act of moving" (Novack 1990:7). Adam Benjamin (in Hutchison 2018:75) makes use of improvisation with the intention of encouraging in the dancers a re-evaluation of their bodies. Contact improvisation is related to improvisation – the former simply refers to improvisation that happens with a partner.

South African dance world include Gerard Samuels's establishment of the "first youth disability dance programme with the Open Air School in Durban" in 2002 (Hutchison 2018:75).

These examples are indeed worth considering in the wider scope of inclusive dance. However, in the South African ballet world, any engagement with disability and disfigurement still await. My focus on the style of ballet serves firstly to confine this dissertation's focus, in turn, ensuring an in-depth and thorough investigation of my subjects. Ballet is also at the centre of this dissertation due to its particularly bad reputation, compared to other dance styles such as those mentioned above. I wish to produce a different perspective on the art form through a multidimensional framework. Unfortunately, as there has not yet been any documented interaction between the South African ballet world and disability and disfigurement, the subjects of my case studies have been selected internationally. Due to this dissertation's fundamental use of secondary sources, I also selected subjects that are quite prominent and well-known, ensuring that there is adequate and relevant visual material for investigation.

In finalising this chapter, I briefly but carefully consider the notions of restoration, de/stigmatisation, empowerment and inclusion to ensure a comprehensive and effective analysis of my subject(s). I also make reference to Collins *et al* (2022) to point out common barriers that prevent the attainment of these processes and their subsequent objectives.

2.2.11 From Social Inclusion & Empowerment

Stigma causes undesirable emotions within self and other, which ultimately accentuates feelings of otherness (Matson-Barkat, Puncheva-Michelotti, Koets & Hennekam 2022:77). Collins *et al* (2022:311) define social inclusion as "a process with four interlocking dimensions" allowing "everyone [to feel] valued and [have] the opportunity to participate … whether or not they have a disability". It involves initiations that strive to exclude no one and to circumvent the socio-economic consequences of such exclusion (Collins *et al* 2022:311). Social inclusion, as understood by Mor Barack (in Collins *et al* 2022:311), is the provision of equal opportunities to marginalised groups so that they can

thoroughly take part in all social and economic endeavours. As is the case with many other theoretically employed notions, social inclusion cannot be confined to a single definition, as it is subject to various interpretations (Collins *et al* 2022:311).

Strategies of empowerment involve the overcoming of inequality and discrimination, and are fundamental in improving the lives of individuals who experience negative social consequences due to their difference. Sheila Matson-Barkat, Petya Puncheva-Michelotti, Clara Koetz and Sophie Hennekam (2022:78) explain the notion of empowerment:

> [It is] … an iterative process in which people who lack power set personally meaningful goals towards increasing power, take actions towards these goals and observe and reflect on the impact of these actions, drawing on their evolving selfefficacy, knowledge, and competence related to the goal.

Empowering individuals means making the most of their potentials (Collins *et al* 2022:322). This notion allows individuals to engage in the arts in a manner that transcends beyond therapeutic methods, in order to ultimately produce art and function independently (Collins *et al* 2022:313). Empowerment can reduce social barriers, alter attitudes towards disfigured and disabled individuals, and motivate political action (Matson-Barkat *et al* 2022:78). Nonetheless, segregation remains a factor that leads to disempowerment, which results in the barriers that deny inclusion (Collins *et al* 2022:313). In sum, empowerment and restoration centre on and endeavour to alter *perceptions of* disfigurement and disability (multi-dimensionally). I wish to point out that this dissertation makes use of the term *restoration* as an umbrella term that entails the notions of social inclusion, destigmatisation and empowerment. I now explore barriers that inhibit the process and achievement thereof.

2.2.12 Barriers to Inclusion

In Chapter One, it was pointed out by Collins *et al* (2022:309) that despite recent studies on the generalised inclusion of marginalised groups in various settings and organisations, "the management perspective has received less attention" regarding people with disabilities in the field of art. They address barriers that prevent inclusion and that correspond with four dimensions linked to inclusion, identified as *access*, *participation*, *representation* and *empowerment* (Collins *et al* 2022:316). This agenda can be referred

to as the APRE framework. Importantly, Collins *et al* (2022:309) insist that the theories put forth by their study are applicable to various marginalised groups and are not confined to people with disabilities. Thus, these ideas could effectively be applied to people with disfigurement, such as those to be discussed and analysed in this paper. Furthermore, while their study is built on Australian contexts and frameworks, the authors assure its general applicability to various societies (Collins *et al* 2022:309). Collins *et al* (2022:325) contend that these barriers are not confined to people with disabilities – they apply to any marginalised group that may experience exclusion. Therefore, the APRE framework can be employed in different contexts, regarding various stigmatised, excluded and oppressed groups. It is crucial to do so, if a thorough, holistic understanding of barriers to inclusion is desired (Collins *et al* 2022:325). Let us now consider the four dimensions of this framework. Note that, while the arguments made by Collins *et al* (2022) speak to disability, I include individuals with disfigurement in this theme based on the above assertions that prove effective applicability of the theories to such individuals.

Access barriers relate to physical and institutional hindrances, uncertainty and lack of awareness, all of which obstruct entry to the arts for people with disabilities (Collins *et al* 2022:316-317). The notion of *representation* is explained in two parts. The first part regards "the voice in discussion and decision-making" and it comprises the voice of individuals with disabilities (Collins *et al* 2022:312). The second part regards "how [people with disabilities] are spoken [of] by others" which commonly constructs what is deemed true for a subject and affects social understandings of self and other (Collins *et al* 2022:312). Encouraging and welcoming artists with disabilities do more than develop their social wellbeing. In addition, this offers such individuals the opportunity to build their own affirmative identity, which supports a rethinking of difference (Collins *et al* 2022:313). Art can function as a vehicle for overcoming the barriers under consideration, through creating and enabling emotional engagement, social experience and, subsequently, social inclusion (Collins *et al* 2022:313). Barriers to *participation* typically involve an individual's dependence on aid, support or care that may be required due to their disability (Collins *et al* 2022:318). Negative social stances affect the inclusion of these individuals, while also exposing neoliberal and capitalist ideologies that favour "independence and achievement" (Collins *et al* 2022:318). Stigmatisation of these

individuals inhibits processes of inclusion and restoration (Collins *et al* 2022:318). Persisting stereotypes and subsequent derogatory perceptions of these individuals breed fear and misinterpretation of them by others (Collins *et al* 2022:319). On this note, it is necessary to point out that these barriers not only function visibly and superficially. Barriers are also imperceptible and thus complex, seeing that they are not merely shaped by physical factors, but moreover shaped internally by attitudes and understandings (Collins *et al* 2022:319). *Representational* barriers include cultural perspectives as well as the absence of the marginalised group's voice (Collins *et al* 2022:319). *Empowerment* barriers affect the agency that is (or is not) granted to people with difference through their actions (Collins *et al* 2022:321). Empowering these individuals is the ultimate objective, however, it is important to note that all four integrated dimensions have significance (Collins *et al* 2022:322).

The APRE framework reveals the development of social inclusion in the field of art. In addition to highlighting the importance of social inclusion, it also explores barriers that prevent "its attainment" through "a more nuanced understanding" of this issue (Collins *et al* 2022:324-325). Theorists and scholars such as Collins *et al* (2022:325) seek to determine the ability of art to facilitate access, participation, representation and empowerment, provided that the barriers to accomplishing these four dimensions of inclusion are eliminated.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored literature related and relevant to a critical discussion of three key subjects: disfigurement, disability and ballet. Various themes, theories and concepts were dealt with in order to construct a framework and foundation for the analyses that are to follow. The main building block of this framework is the notion of multidimensionality, with respect to body and ballet. Other key concepts that are critical to the analyses of my subjects, which take place in the ensuing chapters, include abjection, the power of performance, inclusion in the performing arts, perceptions, understandings and representations of disfigurement and disability, visibility and control. These themes, theories and concepts collectively support the goal of this dissertation: to untangle disfigurement, disability and ballet from dominant and problematic ideologies, produce a

constructive and positive perspective on body and ballet, and subsequently facilitate social inclusion, destigmatisation and empowerment for those living with disfigurement and disability.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DANCER

3.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the body in the context of disfigurement, disability and ballet by considering the lives of two dancers. The first dancer I analyse is the world-renowned African-American ballerina currently dancing with Boston Ballet, Michaela DePrince. DePrince, having a condition known as vitiligo, serves as an example of a person with disfigurement. The second dancer, Joe Powell-Main, is a wheelchair dancer (also making use of crutches) with Ballet Cymru. Powell-Main suffered injuries to his leg, resulting in the loss of motor functioning, thus serving as an example of a person with physical disability. This section focuses on bodies in dance, more specifically disabled and disfigured bodies in dance. In this Chapter, I wish to focus on dance predominantly from the perspective and experience of the dancer, while also considering in the semiotic analyses the perspective and position of the viewer. I make use of the literature introduced and discussed in Chapter Two in order to provide a thorough analysis of these two subjects.

Ableist ideology is frankly and concisely described by Hehir (in Hayden & Prince 2020:2) as favouring a child that walks rather than rolls, speaks rather than signs, reads print and spells independently, as well as engage and interact with non-disabled children rather than disabled children. The same perception can be applied to adults. Common social representations and interpretations of people with disability are built on derogatory myths and stereotypes, some of which I have identified in Chapter Two. Dominant depictions of visible difference label those with physical disability and disfigurement as murderers and terrorists, and attach violent or dangerous qualities to them (Bogdan 2012:116). These representations refuse to consider people with difference in their multidimensionality, robbing them of their identity and true selves and portraying only their "abnormality" (Fudge Schormans 2011:201-202). Myths that are cultivated through these representations associate individuals with disfigurement with negative attributes (Frances 2012:119). Common reactions to disfigurement include stares, distancing, as well as invasive and inappropriate questions or comments. MacGregor (in Frances 2012:114) argues that those with disfigurement endure social attacks, insulting responses, ridicule

and avoidance. One of the major flaws of dominant representations and interpretations of disfigurement is that appearance is equated with immorality. Subsequently, those that appear different are considered to be inferior and subservient to those that appear normal (Frances 2012:119). Fear, pity and ridicule often accompany social reactions to visible difference (Bogdan 2012:128). Governing ideological representations of such difference exploit those with disfigurement and physical disability by presenting their bodies as the basis of entertainment and amusement, making of them a spectacle from a distance. In closing this distance and considering people from a multidimensional perspective, I believe it is possible to admire and celebrate these individuals' art and talent, and moreover, to rid them of harmful (mis)perceptions.

3.2 Michaela DePrince

3.2.1 Hermeneutic Analysis

Michaela DePrince[11] is an African-American professional ballerina, employed (at this time) at Boston Ballet, Massachusetts. This dissertation makes reference to DePrince's autobiography co-written with her mother Elaine DePrince, *Hope in a Ballet Shoe: Orphaned by War, Saved by Ballet* (2015), as well as interviews and magazine/internet articles in providing information on the dancer and subsequently conducting an analysis. As noted, DePrince "was born with a skin condition [known as] vitiligo" (DePrince & DePrince 2015:1). "Vitiligo is an acquired depigmentation disorder" affecting the skin (Parsad, Dogra & Kanwar 2003). Due to this condition, certain parts of DePrince's skin appear with spots or patches that do not contain pigment (melanin)[12].

[11] DePrince's professional journey started at a very young age, when she first toured with Albany Berkshire Ballet at just twelve years old (DePrince & DePrince 2015:179). At age seventeen, she performed with Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Dutch National Junior Company (apprentice level), a year later joining the Dutch National Ballet (professional company). Her journey with Boston Ballet started in 2021 (Michaela DePrince [sa]). Apart from her employment with these companies, DePrince also featured in and represented numerous other projects, such as ABC's *Dancing with the Stars* and her debut as principal in the production of *Le Corsaire* by South African company (2012).

[12] Vitiligo is believed to be a chronic autoimmune disease. Persons with this condition may have a higher chance of developing other autoimmune disorders. Occasionally, vitiligo may be hereditary, however this has not been proven to be the case. The condition is incurable, but treatment can prove helpful in "stopping the progression and reversing its effects" (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases 2022)

DePrince was born in Sierra Leone at a time of civil war[13] (Rodulfo 2017). Her first encounter with ballet was through a magazine that she found as a young orphan. The discovery of an image of a ballerina in a glittering pink tutu, standing on the tips of her toes in pointe shoes, represents a significant moment in DePrince's pursuit of dance and her journey to becoming the person (and dancer) that she is today. Reminiscent of the title of her autobiographical book, DePrince (2015:57) refers to this image as her "only hope … [her] promise of a better life". I elaborate on DePrince's life story throughout the analysis that follows.

In her autobiography, DePrince (2015) describes her identity/ies at various points in her life. The book opens with an emotive description of her identity in three phases or parts: first according to her origin and the beginning of her life, then according to a second identity –which she carries still today – and finally according to the character(s) that she portrays in her performance of dance. She refers to these identities as 1) Mabinty Bangura, 2) Michaela DePrince[14] and 3) Odile[15] (dancer). This process of identification occurs numerous times throughout DePrince's (2015:1) account of her life, from young orphan to professional ballerina. I wish to structure the analysis in three parts, that intend to correspond with the three phases in which DePrince identifies herself.

3.2.1.1 Mabinty: Devil Child

Davinder Parsad, Sunil Dogra and Amrinder Jit Kanwar (2003) maintain that vitiligo holds severe impacts on the social and psychological functioning as well as the quality of life of an individual diagnosed with the condition. Although their study was conducted in

[13] Born Mabinty Bangura 6 January 1995, during the midst of the Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002), "one of the bloodiest [wars] in Africa resulting in more than fifty thousand people dead and half a million displaced in a nation of four million people" (Momodu 2017).

[14] Upon adoption by Elaine DePrince, Mabinty's name was changed to Michaela.

[15] Odile is the name of the Black Swan in the Classical Ballet *Swan Lake*, originally choreographed by Julius Reisinger to the music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Performed well, the character is manipulative and powerful. DePrince uses the terms "vile", "chilly" and "tantalising" to describe the character (DePrince & DePrince 2015:x-1). Odile is a seductress who "uses her womanly charms" to steal the prince from Odette (the White Swan) (DePrince & DePrince 2015:x). Like DePrince (in her book), I also make use of the character's name so as to emphasise the fluidity of DePrince's identity/ies and, moreover, the transcendental state that she experiences when she dances. She is no longer herself, but the character, Odile.

India, there are similarities that can be drawn with the experiences of African-born DePrince. Since her very birth, DePrince – originally named Mabinty Bangura – was reduced to her skin condition. Consequently, she experienced severe social rejection from others, including her biological family. In her autobiography, DePrince (2015:2) recalls her uncle constantly calling her "a worthless, spotted girl child". DePrince can be considered as an individual with disfigurement, for (parts of) her skin presents with "aesthetic effects of a mark" and/or an irregularity to the face or body (Changing Faces in Martindale 2015:22). Supporting the classification of DePrince as disfigured, Frances simply and straightforwardly describes disfigurement as "a condition, injury, or illness that affects the way [someone looks]" (2012:113).

In terms of bodily multidimensionality, vitiligo physically disfigures DePrince's first dimension – her visible bodily surface. However, the social and psychological effects of this condition will be shown to penetrate through to her third dimension – her identity and sense of self (Grabher 2016:131). In her book, DePrince (2015:3) states that other children were scared of her and avoided any interaction with her because of her appearance. Even her own cousins, who were the only children that would occasionally play with DePrince, were reluctant to engage with her. Consequently, DePrince's early days were those, more than ever, in which she experienced loneliness, abandonment and mistreatment. Aligning with the social experiences recalled by DePrince, some of the social consequences of disfigurement mentioned by Frances (2012:114) include stares, distancing oneself from a person with disfigurement, "rude remarks" and "invasive questions". DePrince, like other individuals with visible difference, frequently endure "visual and verbal assaults", "manifestations of pity or aversion", "ridicule and outright avoidance" which result in "feelings of shame, impotence, anger and humiliation" (Macgregor in Frances 2012:114). In the second section of this analysis, the second phase of DePrince's account of identity, these experiences are shown to continue.

Due to her skin condition, DePrince fails to "pass as normal" and she becomes visible in the perception of the other. As explained, through the theories of Yaron *et al*, Leder and Goffman, DePrince's difference disrupts and dislocates perception, sensation and observation (Yaron *et al* 2017:285-286). As also noted earlier, Frances employs the

notion of civil inattention to explain the in/visibility dichotomy of the perceptions of ab/normal people. Those deemed normal become invisible and are unconsciously observed by others, while, on the contrary, those with disfigurement are denied such "civil inattention", due to their perceived abnormality and subsequent visibility (Frances 2012:114-115). Negative attention is drawn to difference such as DePrince's vitiligo, denying the unconscious perception of such individuals. Concisely yet powerfully put, Frances states that "alertness to deviancy facilitates self-consciousness of conformity" (2012:115-117).

This visual process results in DePrince's appearance attracting undesired attention that leads to segregation and stigma. Soon, it will become clear that this attention is accrued both within the self and the other. These consequences prevent, or at the very least complicate, DePrince's social interaction with others. According to Leder (in Yaron *et al* 2017:288), DePrince's *dys*-appearance interferes with her immersion in her lifeworld. She is unable to function normally among others, because her difference – her visibility – positions her as other, separating her from her peers. This process, leading to social rejection, and the consequences of DePrince's nonconforming appearance are repeated throughout her childhood, and perhaps still to this day – although the extremities can primarily be recognised in her younger days as Mabinty Bangura (her original name).

DePrince's nonconformity to social standards holds detrimental consequences for the self that penetrate further than her first, visible dimension, as argued by Grabher. I seek to demonstrate the ways in which perceptions of DePrince's visible difference, in her first dimension, affect her second and third dimensions as well, in turn exposing the depth of damage caused by ideologically driven, superficial perceptions and interpretations of the body. I do so through employing the theory of abjection as devised by Kristeva and through relying on a multidimensional perspective on the body.

DePrince's father was killed by rebels at the time of the war, after which she and her mother were reluctantly taken in by her uncle. Not long after the death of her father, her mother also passed away due to starvation (Goalcast 2021). This left a devastated three-year-old DePrince under the supervision of an uncle who made it very clear he did not

want her or anything to do with her (DePrince & DePrince 2015:11-16). As noted, I intend to explain DePrince's social and emotional circumstances during this period of her life through the theory of abjection. Abjection has been defined as a system that separates human from non-human, and considers that which is situated somewhere in between as *abject*, as excluded and undefined (Creed 1986:68). The abject is thus a non-object that is indefinable, ephemeral and mysterious (Frances 2012:126). Its ambivalence is at once "familiar and foreign", *dys*-located where interpretation is denied (Frances 2012:126). As a consequence of being othered due to her bodily difference, DePrince can be said to be abjected by society and therefore she is denied inclusion, acceptance and an identity. It has been determined that abjection generally relates either to biological functioning of the body or to symbolic and religious factors (Creed 1986:69). In DePrince's case, as I will demonstrate, abjection occurs in both these directions.

DePrince, as an individual with disfigurement, stands in contrast with the normal body that is hidden from conscious view, in that she actively and suddenly becomes visible (Frances 2012:131). In understanding DePrince through the lens of abjection, it can be argued that her disfigurement – her (biological) bodily difference – becomes abjected by the other in that her appearance positions her as visually abnormal. This occurs due to her body's threat to classification and order of an ideological system of interpretation (Creed 1986:68). According to Creed's (1986:71) arguments, DePrince's body – her disfigurement – threatens the borders of such order. As a consequence of her appearance, DePrince is separated from other children in her childhood. Perception(s) shaped of DePrince (among others) by her uncle positions her as abject due to the *dys*-functioning of her body. Vitiligo can be understood in this light by considering the *dys*-functioning of melanocytes in producing melanin (pigmentation). In the process of abjection, any bodily process or product, "bodily damage" or death locates the self within an undefined space, simultaneously generating feelings of repulsion and fascination (Frances 2012:126). Consequently, people stare and abjectify, in a desperate attempt to revive our self-conscious and symbolic capacity as humans (Frances 2012:126). One of the many painful early-childhood memories that DePrince (2015:11) refers to in her autobiography, comparing her to a beastly animal, is indicative of her abjection:

> Uncle Abdullah would yell at me … '[y]ou are a useless child! Look at you. How ugly you are. You have the spots of a leopard. I am wasting food and

> money on you. I will not even get a bride-price in return. Who would want to marry a girl who looks like a dangerous beast of the jungle?'.

These statements demonstrate DePrince's position as abject, as undeserving of basic human needs such as food. DePrince (2015:16) recollects another harsh comment: "Mabinty brings us nothing but trouble. It is the spots". Amidst the darkest days of her life, following the death of her mother, DePrince was taken to an orphanage by her uncle and "left … without as much as a goodbye" (DePrince & DePrince 2015:20-23). At the orphanage, DePrince was named Number Twenty-Seven, labelling her the least-favoured among a total of twenty-seven orphans. Her assigned identity implied that she would receive the smallest portion of food which left her starving and, regarding clothes, she received barely more than underwear (TEDx Talks 2014). It can be noted that, while only her first dimension appears atypical, DePrince's second dimension – her physical functioning and movability – suffers due to perceptions of her first dimension. This can be seen in the fact that she had to endure physical suffering, such as severe malnourishment and deemed undeserving of clothes, as well as physical mistreatment that all affect the body in its second dimension.

During this time, DePrince (2015:29-30) also recalls being abused, beaten and punished, even by the other orphaned children. Parsad *et al* (2003) comment on such experience, which particularly affects the lives of young girls and women with this condition. The appearance and religious connotations that are associated with vitiligo deem these women unfit for marriage – those who are married prior to acquiring vitiligo are to suffer hardships in their marriage. Vitiligo impacts self-image, caused by undesired attention and negative remarks, among other harmful social responses (Parsad *et al* 2003). As can be understood from the analysis of DePrince, it is clear that individuals with vitiligo are often antagonised and ostracised (Parsad *et al* 2003). These social perceptions of vitiligo evidently affect an individual beyond his/her visual dimension, penetrating through the second dimension and into the third. The abuse and neglect that DePrince experienced as a child hold inevitable and significant negative consequences that harmed her identity, her sense of self and her spirituality. The extent of this harm is mournfully described in an interview with DePrince, when she admits, after sustaining a stab wound in her stomach from a young war rebel: "I felt very much alone. I really wanted to die" (Goalcast

2021). This statement points to the severity of the social exclusion, rejection and mistreatment experienced by those with disfigurement. It is worth noting that the extent and intensity of these consequences may depend on, and differ with regards to, religious and cultural circumstances.

Parsad *et al's* (2003) study conducted on the social impacts of vitiligo in India is applicable in DePrince's case, as it exposes inherent cultural associations between vitiligo and religious beliefs, classifying the condition as a result of misfortune or a curse in some way or another. Locally, DePrince's skin condition was believed to be a curse of the devil. Her spots were seen as contagious, and she explains that she would constantly be ridiculed by the other orphans: "Devil child! Leopard girl! I don't want to catch your spots." (DePrince & DePrince 2015:31). Social perceptions of DePrince's outward appearance associate her disfigurement with her spirituality, as well as with her psychological and physical capabilities. Her disfigurement is seen as a "disease" that can spread to others, both in a physical sense and a meta-physical sense. In the former sense, DePrince can be analysed with regards to the process of becoming-contaminated as explained by Koskentola. Koskentola (2017:26) points out that disease, in abject terms, involves movement between spaces and is seen as being transmittable from one person to the next. Reinforcing the disfigured body's position as abject, Douglas (1969) argues that this body is not clearly identified, lying somewhere in between definitions. A subsequent link can be made between this abject body and the notion of becoming-contaminated, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. It can thus be argued that DePrince's disfigurement, considered a contagious disease, *dys*-locates her in a space where she is undefined, and subsequently threatens the self through a process of becoming-contaminated. Moreover, the term "devil child" literally equates DePrince with evil and labels her as a sinister spirit or devil. She is therefore disregarded as a human being and denied any compassion or acceptance in any way. Subsequently, DePrince is loathed and rejected – thus, abjected – due to fear of contamination or, as stated by Douglas, threat to traditional order (Douglas in Martindale 2015:127).

Once again, DePrince's first dimensional appearance generates, through social perceptions and beliefs, an unfavourable territory in which her interpretation and regard

take place – in turn, generating negative consequences for her second and third dimensions, in that her physical and psychological functioning is shaped by this position. Social understandings of DePrince are shown to be determined purely by her outward appearance, yet they affect her internally by robbing her of agency and identity. DePrince experiences the same abjection a little while later, during her adoption process, when local physicians in Sierra Leone misdiagnosed her vitiligo as symptoms of congenital syphilis (DePrince & DePrince 2015:69). This again can be associated with the idea of her disfigurement as a "disease" that is "contagious" and thus as posing a threat to traditional social order. Furthermore, the association of DePrince's condition as a curse, points to religious interpretation. I thus now consider the second form of abjection, in other words, the meta-physical sense in which DePrince's disfigurement is seen as a contagious disease.

It can be argued that, based on the beliefs that accompany social perceptions of her disfigurement, DePrince is reduced, rejected and subsequently abjected in relation to symbolic, religious and/or spiritual factors. This is evident in analysing some of the social labels that she is given by others, such as being named "devil child", which imply that her disfigurement, and by extension DePrince herself, is somehow an evil attribute or byproduct (DePrince & DePrince 2015:31). In addition, the negative associations made between vitiligo and young women's marital outcomes according to some religions (applicable in DePrince's case), as pointed out above, lead to DePrince's interpretation as spiritual abject (Parsad *et al* 2003). Another remark, once again made by DePrince's uncle, and contributing to her religious abjection, claims that "[i]t is the spots … that [bring] nothing but trouble" (DePrince & DePrince 2015:16).

During her days spent in Sierra Leone, DePrince's disfigurement was held responsible for any and all misfortunes that the people around her would experience. This reinforces her position as abject in a spiritual sense. As demonstrated above, she is also abjected in a physical, bodily sense. DePrince's position as two-directional or dual abject – both in terms of bodily functioning and religious interpretation – is not the only finding that can be drawn from these accounts. Important conclusions can be drawn from the process of abjection that has been described and analysed in this section. In abjectifying DePrince

due to her disfigurement, both in body and in spirit, the very process of abjection points to the multidimensionality of the human body. Linking DePrince's vitiligo to her psychological, emotional and spiritual qualities and outcomes, abjection undeniably connects her first, second and third dimensions. In other words, DePrince's appearance (first dimension) is associated with her emotional and spiritual capacity and her *a*morality (third dimension) which are believed to result in misfortune, impaired capability and negative actions (second dimension). Therefore, while I do not wish to promote such a viewpoint, through analysing abject perspectives on DePrince, an understanding of the multidimensionality of the body and the importance thereof emerges.

In concluding this section of DePrince's analysis, it is worth noting the permanence of vitiligo, in recognising it as a chronic condition (Parsad *et al* 2003). Subsequently, DePrince can be considered in a perpetual state of abjection. The comments and abusive language directed at DePrince – subsequent abjection – demonstrate how an individual's outward appearance can easily and misguidedly be equated with or linked to his/her potential and capacity as a person. It is crucial to remind ourselves that such social processing occurs as a result of ideological philosophy. Dominant ideology inculcates people to equate appearance with moral worth. This suppresses the realities and truths behind individuality, personality and identity (Frances 2012:128). These social perceptions and responses expose the inadequacies of a superficial consideration of the body, by prohibiting any fixed definition for of interpretation of bodies with difference, but moreover also fails to consider the body as multidimensional – all of which inhibit the restoration of the (disfigured/disabled) body.

3.2.1.2 Michaela: The Dancer with Difference

DePrince's first encounter with ballet was through a magazine that she found as a young orphan in her hometown. Discovering an image of a ballerina standing *en pointe*, dressed in a dazzling pink tutu is designated as the defining moment in DePrince's dream of dance and journey on becoming who she is today. As noted previously, this image was considered her "only hope … [her] promise of a better life" (2015:57). Although at the time it had been nothing more than an unlikely fantasy, this can be seen as the very beginning of her exceptional journey as a dancer. Labelled Number Twenty-Seven, and

as a result of her vitiligo, DePrince had been rejected by twelve families before she was adopted by an American couple (Goalcast 2021). Following her adoption and relocation to the United States of America, a determined DePrince started with ballet classes at the age of four, in the year 1999 (DePrince & DePrince 2015:81).

DePrince's account(s) of her experience in the United States of America shape important social and cultural observations in this analysis. Others would often act out of curiosity and enquire about her appearance, which may not necessarily imply intended bullying or ostracism. Nevertheless, as she points out herself, such remarks and inquisitiveness still affect a child by producing feelings of embarrassment and difference (DePrince & DePrince 2015:87). Curious responses are seen as inappropriate, invasive and patronising because it singles out an individual among others, amplifying their already prominent visibility (Frances 2012:129). These instances of social perceptions and reactions to individuals such as DePrince result in and reinforce the marginalisation of people with difference (Frances 2012:131). This experience demonstrates DePrince's persisting visibility, both on the part of the self and of others. Growing up in America, perceptions of DePrince's disfigurement continued to define her and, subsequently, continued to reduce her identity. Indicative of the significance and extent of social (mis)understandings and ideologies regarding disfigurement, it should be noted that, despite the change in cultural, social, religious and ethnic circumstances, rejection and othering of DePrince persists.

In the process of starting with ballet classes, DePrince (2015) explains the exposure and visibility that she would experience in the ballet studio. DePrince comments on the space of the ballet studio, echoing Kleiner's theory on performance. In the studio, a space filled with mirrors, DePrince became aware of her difference and subsequently became visible, constantly observed by herself and by others (Kleiner 2009:244). In this space (as well as in general) DePrince experienced what Kleiner explains as a vulnerability in a place that is arguably saturated with strict systems and beliefs regarding discipline and order (Kleiner 2009:244). DePrince's visual difference was heightened by the presence of mirrors and, oftentimes, the disapproving glares of fellow dance students. It is worth noting that a standard ballet leotard, similar to a swimming costume, does not cover much

of one's neck, back or arms. DePrince's experience of social visibility due to her difference amplified as she stepped into the ballet studio. She claims: "I hated the idea of staring at my spots in the mirror through an entire lesson, so when we went shopping for dance wear, I insisted on a poloneck, long-sleeved leotard" (DePrince & DePrince 2015:88).

Although Kleiner (2009) distinguishes between studio and stage, there may indeed exist possibilities for affirmative experiences within the space of the studio, under certain circumstances. In demonstrating these possibilities, I refer to Sayako Ono's (2015:203) interpretation of the space in which ballet occurs – in both spaces – in her observation of the training and performance of (amateur) ballet dancers:

> not only through their own movement but through interaction with others, they could embody knowledge (enact the process of self-reflection), and solve the problem of perceiving themselves as only being bodily objects (or alternatively disembodied states).

However, in the space of the studio, particularly due to her atypical appearance, DePrince nonetheless experienced feelings of exclusion and difference. The next section of this analysis intends to demonstrate how such experience – which may remain problematic in the implementation of ballet in the space of the studio – can be overcome, by considering DePrince in the space of the stage.

In analysing DePrince's experience and self-scrutiny not only in the ballet studio but also in her everyday social life, I return to Albright (1997:58), who contends that bodily difference is expected to be concealed in order to conform to social standards of normality. DePrince's mother took on an affirmative and encouraging role in her life and her opinion was highly influential when it came to DePrince's acceptance of her skin condition, her identity and her confidence. The dancer recalls her mother's response to her apprehension towards attending ballet classes without covering her difference:

> [Y]ou won't be able to wear a long-sleeved leotard with a poloneck when you're a world-famous ballerina, so you might as well get used to not wearing one now (DePrince & DePrince 2015:89).

In overcoming feelings and experiences of difference due to her vitiligo, DePrince's love for ballet and her adoptive mother's affirming influence gave her the necessary impetus to pursue her passion despite her setbacks. Practising ballet with the intention of accomplishing individual aims and aspirations is one of the primary motivations that define it as an enjoyable and favoured art form (Ono 2015:83). Pointing to the multidimensionality of dance, Ono (2015:191) notes the various reasons that lead to an engagement with ballet, including perceived physical, aesthetic and psychological benefits. Psychologically, ballet is believed – by those who implement it – to function as a "bodily [practice] of self-cultivation or coming to know oneself". DePrince's determination to "become" the ballerina which she encountered as a child in the magazine served as her psychological and emotional motivation behind pursuing ballet. DePrince notes that the powerful impact of this image did not merely owe to the face that the woman in the picture was dancing ballet, but moreover that she seemed happy *because* of dancing (Goalcast 2021). This image came to define the idea of happiness for DePrince. She believed that, if anything could, ballet would change her life and allow her to experience such happiness (TEDx Talks 2014). Ballet, through its immersive qualities, is shown to open up a space in which self-focus and desired self-identity can be established external to society's governing ideologies (Ono 2015:192). I now analyse DePrince in the space of the stage, considering body and dance in their multidimensionality, with the intention of illustrating the restorative capacity/ies of ballet.

3.2.1.3 Odile: The Black Swan

Despite accusations that position ballet as degrading and damaging, which remain predominant, there is a growing opposing claim that proves the "potential for professional dancers to express their agency through dancing ballet" (Ono 2015:48). Ono (2015:48) remarks a lingering flaw that prevents the success of this latter view, which lies in the fact that the *ways* through which dancers express their identities in ballet are not critically considered. In response to this shortcoming, her research is an exploration of the ways in which ballet is capable of reflecting and reinforcing emotions (Ono 2015:48). My analysis of DePrince also intends to overcome this flaw by critically considering the experience and process through which she achieves self-expression in ballet.

Regardless of the social stigma and segregation DePrince encountered due to her disfigurement, she stopped at nothing in her pursuit of becoming a professional ballerina (Rodulfo 2017). When her first opportunity to perform on stage arrived, DePrince asked her mother to confirm whether her vitiligo could be detected on stage from the viewpoint of the audience. At the time, this would ultimately determine her fate of pursuing her dream of becoming a professional dancer, says DePrince (2015:95). She inherently believed that it would not be possible for her to dance and perform if her disfigurement could be seen by others (on stage). This once again resonates with societal expectations of concealing difference in order to pass as normal or "invisible" as well as the flawed belief that appearance is linked to an individual's capability or success. I now intend to analyse DePrince's identity as a dancer (with disfigurement) from and within two theoretical positions. First, I consider the notions of performance and stage. Thereafter, I consider DePrince in relation to the dimensions of body and dance.

It has been determined that the space of ballet differs from studio and training to stage and performance. The latter space proves to open up possibilities for losing feelings of self-consciousness, exposure, visibility and scrutiny (Kleiner 2009:236-244). This can be demonstrated through the various accounts of performance described by DePrince (2015) in her autobiography. Indicative of the arguments made in the previous section of this analysis, within the space of the studio DePrince constantly feels the need to impress her instructors and to avoid disappointing them in any way. This experience is quite different in the space of the stage (DePrince & DePrince 2015:217). As soon as she enters the space of the stage, all the everyday concerns that would follow her throughout the studio disappear (DePrince & DePrince 2015:232). DePrince (2015:95) states that she became utterly unaware of her appearance the moment that she first stepped on stage. The thrill of performance and the opportunity of expressing herself on stage overwhelmed all other thoughts and feelings, including the experience of otherness and self-reflexivity. DePrince (2015:95) speaks of a "rush" that she experienced/experiences by the audience's applause and calls it "intoxicating" and addictive. These feelings, indicating the multidimensional benefit and value of ballet, ultimately determined her career as a professional dancer and performer. In addition, this experience of DePrince demonstrates

the way(s) in which an othered, even abjected, individual can gain a sense of identity, agency and empowerment through ballet.

Although, as noted, Ono does not separate studio from stage, she remarks additional affirmative elements gained through dancing on stage – arguing that the act of performing ballet on stage generates excitement and passion in dancers. According to personal interviews conducted by Ono (2015:223), the opportunity to become a different person on stage served as a principal motivation behind these affirmative feelings and experiences. On stage, individuals are allowed the opportunity to perform or display their ideal, desired self-identities (Ono 2015:224). It is clear that DePrince, even though she was anxiety-ridden prior to her performance, escaped feelings of self-consciousness and the visibility of her difference when she found herself in the space of performance and stage. This space, as noted by Kleiner (2009:250), offers such a loss of self-consciousness through allowing DePrince to express and artistically implement ballet. The rewarding effects of performance are also evident in DePrince's account. Kleiner's (2009:251) theory shows how performance allows DePrince the opportunity to experience the pleasures of dance, and that this experience overrides the apprehension caused by possible critical perceptions from the audience. This allows her to re-story or recreate herself, free from negative and derogatory designations fabricated and assigned by society. Once again underscoring the significance of this powerful process, such a view insists on a consideration of the artistry, expressivity and fulfillment that come with ballet. Rather than a mere focus on the (critical) surveillance of the dancer's body, a broader view is opened up to accommodate 1) the experience of the dancer and 2) a positive perspective on ballet (Kleiner 2009:251).

In the space of performance, DePrince is freed from self-conscious reflection, and reflexivity, and instead she is capable of performing and deriving the subsequent experiences thereof. Kleiner (2009:251) also points to the absence of the mirror, the instructor and his/her interruptive role in dancing, in highlighting the empowering capacity of the stage. Kleiner (2009:251) states that the absence of the mirror in this space allows for an interruption of the perception of bodily difference by the dancer. I have indicated that my analysis interprets and employs this theory of Kleiner in relation to the

perspective of the self. It is revealed that DePrince's mother had lied to her when assuring her that she could not see her disfigurement. It was, in fact, visible on stage from the audience's perspective. However, in believing that her disfigurement was not visible from the audience, DePrince (2015:95) felt capable of following her dreams without the worries of what others think and say of her and without having to doubt herself. Thus, while in a purely literal and visual sense the audience could perhaps notice DePrince's vitiligo, the space of the stage deemed her disfigurement invisible within her own self-perception. Subsequently, DePrince is released from any negative (self) perception of her disfigurement and thus empowered by dancing. The dancer's personal experience is of significance here. The experience of performance, as I will illustrate later in this section, allows DePrince to enter the metaphysical, transcendental dimension of ballet.

Three dimensions of the body have been identified, the first being the outer surface which is visible, the second being the intermediary moveable dimension and the third being the invisible dimension representing the inner-being and identity of an individual (Grabher 2016:131). The third dimension can be analysed in terms of DePrince's three distinct identities that she embodies in three distinct phases of her life. Let us reiterate these identities: 1) as a young child in Sierra Leone who became orphaned, she first embodies the identity of Mabinty Bangura, 2) following her adoption and relocation to America, she embodies a new identity, having been renamed Michaela DePrince and 3) as ballerina and performer, she embodies the character of the Black Swan, Odile (DePrince & DePrince 2015:1). While DePrince's first and second dimensions certainly changed (and still change) throughout her life in a physical sense, this shift in identity takes place over time within the third dimension of the body.

The disapproving perceptions of DePrince, particularly those discussed in the first part of this analysis, demonstrate the insufficiencies of the social interpretation(s) of her as a person, which take into account merely her first bodily dimension. From the perspective of others, DePrince's disfigurement only physically penetrates this first dimension, while undoubtedly and remarkably affecting the perceived capacity of her second dimension as well as, in a non-literal sense, affecting her third dimension. Due to politically driven social understandings of her, based solely on appearance or physicality, DePrince's

second bodily dimension is devalued, and her third bodily dimension is completely denied and neglected. Shifting from Mabinty to Michaela, DePrince experienced feelings of acceptance and affection (as opposed to rejection, hatred and fear) that she could not comprehend. Indicating the damage that had been done by the social perceptions, treatment and subsequent experiences of DePrince as a very young child, she claims that she could not believe or understand why and how she, who "looked like a monster", could be loved (Goalcast 2021). This statement demonstrates an embedded, indeed damaged, self-perception that has been shaped by dominant ideologies surrounding disfigurement – a result of having been denied acceptance and any sense of belonging due to her appearance from a very young age.

Focusing on DePrince's identity as dancer, her account(s) of performance and subsequent experience thereof, proves and enhances the existence of a third bodily dimension. The space of the stage allows DePrince to embody any identity and to assume a desired perspective on and perception of self, in turn allowing her to identify as a person and dancer beyond her disfigurement. As argued by Kleiner (2009:251), on stage DePrince is offered the opportunity to take responsibility for her performance – and, by extension, take responsibility for her identity. The power of the performance of ballet can also be considered in multidimensionality by making reference to Hanna's dimensions of dance. Dominant representations of disfigurement position disfigurement itself and those *with* disfigurement in an unfavourable light, deeming it a personal problem to be solved and creating a voyeuristic gaze on such individuals (Frances 2012:119). Repetitive patterns have been identified, associating people with disfigurement as evil, reclusive and bitter (Frances 2012:119). There is also an emphasis on extreme and rare conditions that result in disfigurement, while neglecting more common conditions. Reminiscent of the arguments made in a previous section of this analysis, appearance is also equated with a/morality, designating DePrince, as inferior and subservient compared to those who are considered normal (Frances 2012:119). However, in acknowledging and permitting the significance of Hanna's dimensions of dance, these problematics can be overcome through a new and different representation of disfigurement within the world of ballet. Mattingly (2021:184) underscores the necessity to include the perspective and experience of the dancer in order to transform and formulate a different perspective on ballet. I thus

employ these dimensions of dance to the accounts and experiences of DePrince as a professional ballerina.

Hanna's five dimensions of dance have been categorised as follows: 1) bodily dimension, 2) emotional dimension, 3) cognitive dimension, 4) cultural dimension and 5) religious, or meta-physical, dimension (Hanna 1995:324-325). DePrince's journey in becoming a ballerina can be analysed with respect to and in acknowledging these dimensions.

Relating to the corporeal or bodily dimension of dance, ballet as a form of dance draws on and presents elements of "sight, sound, touch, smell and kinaesthetic feeling" (Hanna 1995:323). DePrince makes reference to these elements when she describes her experience of dance in the space of the studio and of the stage, and considering the features of the spaces – such as the presence or absence of the mirror in the space of dance, or the audience that can be seen and heard from stage. Recalling an incident one year while competing at the YAGP, DePrince (2015:176) explains how, in addition to the obscurity on a dark stage, a veil, which was part of her costume for the dance she was performing, obstructed her ability to see. As noted in the previous section of this analysis, her experience of performance prevailed over her initial worries of possibly tripping or falling due to the veil impairing her vision. This incident serves as an example of Hanna's first dimension of dance.

The cognitive dimension of ballet deals with memory, imagery, perception and attention. As underscored by Hanna, the body, emotion and mind are collectively involved in the practice of dance. These three constituents, as noted, are not merely biological, but also cultural (Hanna 1995:324). Recalling the arguments made by Fitt (in Dixon 2005:76), the science of bodily movement and the art of dance are equally exposed in ballet. In acknowledging a cognitive dimension of dance, a connection between mind and body in the practice of ballet opens up to exploration (Fitt in Dixon 2005:76). In drawing correlations between body and ballet, Grabher's second bodily dimension – responsible for transmitting thoughts, emotions and state of mind – can be considered within Hanna's cognitive dimension of dance (Grabher 2016:131). DePrince's journey to dance can be understood through this dimension. The discovery of an image of a ballerina in a

magazine resulted in a shift in DePrince's mentality as a hopeless orphan in Sierra Leone. As her dancing days commenced, DePrince (2015:88) notes how she "hated the idea of staring at [her] spots in the mirror", due to the destructive perception of self it produced. The previous section of this analysis notes how DePrince (2015:171-176) speaks to herself before performing on stage, and that this process leads to her embodiment of the character that she portrays through her dance. These incidents and experiences can be said to relate to the cognitive dimension of ballet, as identified by Hanna.

In its physical and cognitive dimensions, ballet produces a kinaesthetic experience, which allows for the provision of bodily knowledge and awareness and, in turn, results in a mind-body connection through such embodiment (Ono 2015:204). This process, although occurring in the bodily and cognitive dimensions of dance, penetrates to the deeper (emotional and spiritual) dimensions. Subsequently, the possibility of developing identity and self is offered through ballet. Furthermore, ballet is shown to improve mental conditions, stress and depression (Ono 2015:204).

The cultural dimension of ballet can be understood through its fundamental principles and intentions. As explained by Sklar (1991:6) in the first chapter of this dissertation, dance can be understood as the cultural knowledge embodied within bodily movement. Such knowledge extends beyond somatics, and comprises emotional and cultural elements (Sklar 1991:6). Le Roux *et al* (2021:2) also comment on the cultural dimension of dance, proving that dance – as a performing art – is integral to culture, in functioning as a means through which to promote change. The space in which the art of ballet is produced opens up possibilities to interact in an inspiring and empowering manner, and to develop self-determination (le Roux *et al* 2021:4). The analysis of DePrince's life and experience as a dancer can add to an understanding of the cultural dimension of ballet. Additionally, the portrayal of various characters and stories, as well as the costumes and choreography corresponding with these characters and stories can be seen as cultural aspects of ballet. Furthermore, the space of the studio and stage, and the construction of these spaces, contribute to the cultural structure(s) of ballet.

I now turn to the emotional dimension in dance – arguably, linked with the spiritual dimension – which can be related to Grabher's third bodily dimension as representative of an individual (Grabher 2016:131). In the first chapter, Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012:111) point to flawed beliefs maintaining that ballet should not be positively experienced as an art which can be appreciated and enjoyed, and which can offer fulfilment. DePrince's experience with performance proves that such beliefs fall short in their consideration of ballet as an art form. Terms such as thrilling, intoxicating, exhilarating and addictive, are employed in describing her experience on stage (DePrince & DePrince 2015:95). The loss of self-conscious feelings of otherness and the liberation of performance described by DePrince demonstrate the way(s) in which ballet exceeds a mere corporeal definition.

Once again turning to Buckroyd's argument regarding the connection between mind and body, it is shown that an individual's psychological and physical perceptions of self are inevitably interlinked. According to Buckroyd (in Dixon 2009), it is only through this inseparability between mind and body, in an embodied person, that complete functioning is possible. Subsequently, she favours a stance on ballet that pursues emotional and psychological progress over one that rests purely on physical training (Buckroyd in Dixon 2009:85). From a similar perspective, Topf (in Dixon 2009:85) asserts that dance allows for a rediscovery of feeling. Supporting an emotional dimension of ballet, and moving beyond the physicality of dance, Dixon (2009:93-94) underscores the emotional centre as the source of all movement in dance. Based on the theories of Collins *et al* (2021:313), ballet as an art form, can be seen as a means to overcome social, cultural and political barriers, by producing and facilitating, among other things, emotional engagement. DePrince was determined to overcome stereotypes and stigmas – and subsequent barriers which they produced – through her dancing. In overcoming these hurdles, DePrince relied on a constant self-belief which was extensively generated by the enduring impact of the image of the ballerina that she had once found in Sierra Leone (TEDx Talks 2014). I draw connections between the emotional and religious/spiritual dimension of ballet, as well as Grabher's third bodily dimension, and I elaborate on these emotional aspects in my consideration of Hanna's fifth and final dimension of dance.

The final dimension of dance penetrates through a religious layer. Elevating the dancer (artist) above his/her difference, as argued by Collins *et al* (2021:320), is a necessary step in formulating a restorative perspective on and from ballet. Similarly, the art produced through performing ballet must be considered in relation to an individual's identity (Collins *et al* 2021:321). Speaking to the religious dimension of ballet, processes of integrating dancers with difference can 1) develop social security and self-confidence, and 2) open up opportunities for constructing an affirmative identity (Collins *et al* 2021:313).

From 2006, DePrince competed annually in the Youth American Grand Prix (YAGP), internationally deemed the "largest ballet scholarship competition", where she received an award and, at the early age of twelve, a position as an apprentice for a professional ballet company (DePrince & DePrince 2015:166-181). At the YAGP, as she enters onto stage, DePrince (2015:171-176) speaks to herself, asserting that she is no longer a young girl named Michaela, but instead that she *is* the character which she portrays in her dance. She *becomes* "a Persian princess [on] her wedding day", or "Princess Aurora"[16], or a "Bedouin dancing girl". During her performance, she explains: "I was no longer performing at the YAGP … instead I was dancing in the sheik's tent, swaying along with the silk hangings blown by the wind" (DePrince & DePrince 2015:176). In believing that her identity changes on stage and in performance, DePrince is freed from her insecurities, feelings of difference and social stigma, even if only for the duration of the dance. In other words, by embodying different characters through dancing, DePrince is capable of losing herself in the mind and body of a particular character or dance (DePrince & DePrince 2015:171-191). As I will demonstrate, this empowering experience can be understood in terms of multidimensionality.

Understandably among other things, ballet is said to have affirmatively changed DePrince's life (Goalcast 2014). Beyond her wildest expectations, hopes and dreams, she ultimately became the ballerina that she had dreamt of as a lonely, wounded Sierra

[16] Aurora is the name of the protagonist in the fairytale and Ballet titled *The Sleeping Beauty*. DePrince dances the lead role as Aurora, a dainty and delicate princess. Once again, reference to these characters by DePrince herself shows a flow between identities. It also demonstrates the power of ballet to allow DePrince to experience a transcendence from negative feelings in the real world, into a magical "happily ever after" world.

Leonean orphan (TEDx Talks 2014). DePrince remarks that the significance of this image did not merely lie in the fact that the woman in the picture was a ballerina, but more importantly, what carried meaning was that she appeared happy *because* she was dancing (Goalcast 2021). Utterly enamoured with ballet as a result of this image, a young DePrince concluded that her happiness could be found in dancing, too (TEDx Talks 2014). And it is indeed through ballet that she discovered such happiness. Indicative of the meta-physical, religious and/or spiritual dimension of ballet, DePrince claims: "[Ballet] is how I express myself" (TEDx Talks 2014). Ballet is thus shown to empower DePrince through a shift in identity, as she experiences and engages with the emotional and spiritual dimensions of ballet.

It has been argued that art can aid in developing confidence and self-esteem. It is also seen as an opportunity to explore life and a method through which to self-express (Wallace-DiGarbo & Hill 2006:119). Numerous scholars, according to Ono (2015:32), argue that dance is capable of providing an opportunity for "asserting individual agency through the practice of the body". Moreover, it has been determined, anthropologically, that (self)expression is made possible through the performance of dance (Ono 2015:32). In relation to other dance forms (such as modern dance), ballet proves neglected in academic analysis, particularly when considering the notion of embodiment. Ono (2015:33) asserts that the cause of this lack of scholarly consideration lies in the fact that ballet is believed to function in a highly formalised and disciplined environment, which denies the assertion of individual agency among those who dance. She counters such popularised modes of thinking, pointing to the classification of ballet as a performing art. Through ballet, dancers are offered the opportunity to engage in a sensorial transitioning from "sedimented" towards "indwelling" (Ono 2015:204). Ono's perspective on ballet proves the extensiveness of its multidimensionality, defining ballet as a means of overcoming social segregation, stigma and related consequences of prevailing ideological systems – perhaps an avenue for negating continued negative perspectives on ballet and bodies with difference and, in doing so, restoring body and ballet. Suggestive of this possibility, Ono (2015:206) argues that ballet provides opportunities for those who implement it to escape from ideological systems, even if only for the period in which one resides within this space. Ballet thus becomes "an escape into the self" (Ono 2015:206).

3.2.2 Semiotic Analysis

Natalie Cenci (2018) makes reference to Susan Foster in claiming that the dance that "happens in a bar" is equally fascinating as "the dance that happens on a stage". Dance in understated – sometimes underestimated – spaces, "can tell [us] something completely illuminating about what the body is or can be" (Cenci 2018). In extending my discussion on DePrince beyond hermeneutics, I consider two visual examples and the signs found within them from a semiotic perspective. The first example, a YouTube video, is a short film of DePrince dancing in Beirut during one of her charitable excursions to Lebanon which are aimed at supporting child war refugees (Michaela DePrince 2018). This film can be seen as a performance film. In other words, the film was created as a dance, an artwork, a project, in itself. I therefore analyse this film as a dance, not as a representation of a dance. The second example is a filmed performance of a solo piece titled *Portrait* (2016). The piece was choreographed specially for DePrince by Peter Leung, for the Women in the World Summit London (Leung 2016). The second film can, on the one hand, be seen as a representation of a dance or performance. At the same time, however, the artistic camerawork may position the film itself as a project on its own. Whereas a typical recording of a dance performance would take place from the audience perspective, there are moments in this film where the camera appears to be filming from behind and even from above DePrince as she dances. Moreover, the intentional black and white production of this dance adds to the film's possible designation as a "performance film" – meaning the film *is* the dance, rather than a representation of the dance. Subsequently, I wish to point out that my analysis of these films considers both the documentation of the dance (footage) and the dance itself (choreography, storyline). *To Be Naked* captures DePrince dancing in the ruins of a building in war-torn Beirut. It is therefore not a performance of dance in the space of the stage or in a traditional theatre environment. However, much significance can be found in the setting and visual elements of this performance. *Portrait* is a solo piece, choreographed in the style of neo-classical ballet, and performed in pointe shoes in the space of the stage. Over the years, DePrince has performed this piece on numerous occasions and in various settings. It is therefore worth mentioning that my semiotic analysis on this dance is concerned with one particular performance by DePrince, filmed by Middle Table and produced in an entirely black milieu with contrasts of white, for instance, in the lighting (Leung 2016).

Figure 1: *To Be Naked* Screenshot - In the space of the dance (Michaela DePrince 2018)

In *To Be Naked*, the camera follows DePrince's movement, encircling her and revealing the ruins of the building in which the dance takes place as well as other broken down buildings in the background. She dances in a severely damaged room with peeling and broken down walls. Wooden panels stacked in a corner and construction sheets (drop sheets) indicate a possible attempt at *re*construction. In the room, what seems to be fragments of furniture, and dust, become DePrince's decorated "stage". Windows, doors and a roof are all absent, contributing to the meaning that is created and conveyed in her performance. The audio comprises musical accompaniment to the dance as well as a poem narrated by DePrince. The poem directly relates to this ambience – in turn, relating the ambience with the body – when DePrince speaks of "a house without windows" (Michaela DePrince 2018). Within the relationship between DePrince's dancing and the movement of the camera, the self-other border collapses. The viewer does not sit back and observe the performance. Instead, as seen in a moment captured of DePrince from behind (Figure 1), the viewer moves *with* and circles *around* DePrince, engaging in both her dancing and her environment. The viewer becomes part of the dance, the self and other become one. The stage and audience and the natural divide of performer-spectator are absent in such a heavily non-traditional space of performance. The performance forces its viewers to look at this space, highly visible in its *brokenness*, similar to the atypical

body, seemingly distorted by disfigurement. Yet, in being surrounded by the performance as opposed to viewing or overlooking the performance from *outside*, there is a collapse in the self-other juxtaposition, and therefore a collapse of scrutiny. By immersing the viewer in the dance, DePrince is not seen for her difference, but for the story she chooses to convey through her movement (and speech).

Portrait exhibits a non-traditional set-up on stage, free from any decoration, props or background images. The black-and-white recording emphasises this apparent simplicity and the openness of the performance both to DePrince's story told through her dancing and to the viewer's interpretation of the dance. In *Portrait*, the same collapse of self-versus-other can be revealed (see Figure 2). The camera's lens is frequently cast under bright lights – cast to the viewer – indicating that one is not watching this performance from the space and perspective of the audience, but rather that one is sharing the space of the stage with DePrince. The viewer is placed on the stage, located under the same spotlight as DePrince while she dances, representing once again an evaporation of the boundary between self and other, performer and spectator, stage and audience. Following Kleiner's theory regarding the relief from feelings of difference by performing on stage, the viewer now experiences DePrince's dancing, free from a criticising gaze that reduces her to her (*dys*-)appearance. Moreover, even under possible observation, DePrince is not subjected to criticism for, according to Fisher (2019:4), there exist a variety of gazes – "[n]ot all visual pleasure [is] evil". Ballet, predominantly seen as "oppressive and victimising" for women who dance, can be reimagined in the video clips that I analyse (Clark 2018:80). These performances, contrastingly, depict the empowering capabilities of ballet, through giving DePrince a voice. Free from aesthetic distractions and a passive position as object of scrutiny, DePrince candidly performs and expresses her true self.

Figure 2: *Portrait* Screenshot - In the spotlight and space of the stage (Leung 2016)

Both video clips can be read as artistic presentations and performances of DePrince's multidimensional body. In these performances, DePrince is seen dancing without ballet tights, exposing her legs. In *Portrait* she wears pointe shoes, but in *To Be Naked* her feet, like her legs, are bare. No attempt has been made to cover her neck, back and face to conceal the white patches of skin caused by vitiligo. It is necessary, in analysing these two video clips, to start by pointing out the dominant ideologies surrounding the art of ballet and the dancing body. Aesthetic myths of ballet highly criticise the art form for celebrating "exceedingly thin" bodies (Clark 2018:77). This has become the normalised and idealised ballet body in the aesthetic ideology of the art form (Clark 2018:81). A stereotypical image of the ballerina emerges, dominating the perspective of ballet. Acknowledging the positive potentials of ballet, Angela McRobbie (in Fisher 2019:23) is among a number of scholars to discuss the uplifting opportunities ballet provides for women, in allowing them to join seemingly opposing qualities – "strength" and "feminine beauty". DePrince challenges mythologies of femininity that associate it with fragility. DePrince also challenges the stereotypical image of the ballet body not merely through her beautifully muscular body – representing the strength that McRobbie speaks of – but moreover through proudly wearing and representing her vitiligo, her difference, in the space of dance. Accordingly, aesthetic tropes of beauty are powerfully defied by the raw representation of DePrince in the video clip(s). Indeed, the stereotypical representation

of, and myths associated with, ballet and the ballerina are indicative of the dangers of a non-dimensional perspective on human bodies. In acknowledging the bodily dimensions in the interpretation of body and dance, it is possible to rid ballet (*and* body) of the criticising ideologies embedded in these myths. Taking care not to disregard the impact of these ideological understandings of ballet, Fisher (2019:9) argues bluntly that traditions must be updated. Reformations of these traditional ideas are evident in the two video clips that I analyse in this section, serving to demonstrate the possibilities for restoring ballet and body through a multidimensional perspective of both.

The stereotypical picture of the ballerina consists of an "impossibly petite frame", "pink satin pointe shoes", as well as "almost always long hair pulled back into a neat bun" (Clark 2018:79). This view also reinforces certain ideals of femininity that extend beyond ballet – relating the ideals of ballet with these ideals of femininity (Clark 2018:79). Moreover, these stereotypical images of ballet are "[normalised] and accepted as a truth" (Clark 2018:87). Subsequently, through this lens, ballet is predominantly regarded as oppressive towards women (and other marginalised bodies) (Clark 2018:79). *To Be Naked* entails a physical representation of nakedness in that DePrince is wearing nothing but a black leotard, her hair loose, curly, almost messy, and her feet bare (see Figure 3). This physical representation is a confrontation and rejection of the traditional perspective on, and image created of, the ballerina. Moreover, as explained above, both video clips demonstrate a rejection of the traditional space in which ballet is said to take place. Moving in nature from perceptual to conceptual, ballet has shown to transform during the last decades to involve "new philosophic and aesthetic concepts" as well as "new paradigms for what ballet is meant to accomplish" as an art form (Eiss 2013:72). Significant to a multidimensional perspective, this shift exemplifies a decline in perceptual or visual intentions and objectives behind art and, instead, an increased preference for producing art that holds meaning beyond the visual. Famous twentieth century dancer and choreographer Martha Graham's (in Eiss 2013:72) approach to ballet can be applied to DePrince's performance:

> I wanted to begin not with characters or ideas but with movement … I wanted significant movement. I did not want it to be beautiful or fluid. I wanted it to be fraught with inner meaning, with excitement and surge.

Figure 3: *To Be Naked* Screenshot - Barefoot (Michaela DePrince 2018)

As seen in the visual examples of DePrince, Graham's intention is to relate the dancing body to natural motion and to music. Stripping dance from everything unessential, she sought after a performance "on a bare stage with only costumes and lights", expressionless faces, minimal clothing and unconventional movement (Eiss 2013:73). *To Be Naked* and *Portrait* bring about change in commonly assumed ballet aesthetic, confronting traditional perspectives, for instance by replacing the ballet costume – the tutu or the romantic ballet dress – with the common leotard (Eiss 2013:74). *Portrait* takes place on the bare stage referred to by Graham, the contrasting effect of black and white emphasising the absence of any adornment – there is only the dancing body, the spotlights and the stage, with no distractions (see Figures 4 and 5). I consider the expressionless face at a later stage in this analysis, first turning to the element of clothing or costume. I also return to the idea of unconventional movement in another section, in which I discuss the style of DePrince's dancing in both video clips.

Figure 4: *Portrait* Screenshot - Bare Legs (Leung 2016)

Figure 3: *Portrait* Screenshot - DePrince in leotard on bare stage (Leung 2016)

The mainstream image of the ballerina is definitive: she wears a tiara, therefore she should look and act like a princess; she is skinny, "therefore she is controlled and harassed by

men"; she is exploited by spectators and the "male gaze" (Fisher 2019:4). With regards to the visual elements of the performances of DePrince, I reiterate that she is not wearing a complete ballet costume. As shown in Figures 1 and 5, she is dressed in nothing but a black leotard, contrasting with the dominant images of the ballerina as pointed out by Fisher. In *Portrait,* DePrince is seen *en pointe*, as opposed to dancing barefoot (*To Be Naked*). Significantly, apparent in Figure 3, her pointe shoes match the colour of her skin and subsequently rejects Marianne Clark's (2018:79) description of the stereotypical ballerina's "pink satin pointe shoes". This is also symbolic of the diversity that is indeed striven for in ballet, countering traditional myths and ideals regarding the art form. Returning to the theme of nakedness, in both video clips, the minimalism of DePrince's costume is representational of a certain vulnerability that accompanies the process of becoming and expressing self.

Criticism of the dominant aesthetic of ballet is a very popular subject in academic work. However, such criticism is typically directed at ballet in itself, rather than the ideologies constructed around it. At the core of ballet's aesthetic criticism lies the "prima ballerina's body", seen as a "spectacle … and object of male desire" (Clark 2018:79). Common understandings of ballet therefore regard the (female) ballet dancer as submissive and passive in her relationship to her dance partner(s) and spectators (Clark 2018:79-80). Fisher (2019:4) points out that Clement Crisp – likely also a stance taken by many other scholars – reduces the ballerina and her admirers to a convenient stereotype. Similarly, early feminist ideology criticises the image of the ballerina as one in opposition to the "strong independent woman". Contesting this myth of passivity and objectification commonly associated with the ballerina, both video clips demonstrate a disruption of the self-other – or spectator-object – binary that would otherwise isolate DePrince from a scrutinising audience.

Traditional perspectives of ballet maintain that it involves the creation of desired lines of and within the body (Clark 2018:86). This is commonly abbreviated and referred to as "line" among dancers. Fisher (2019:2) describes "line" as "the severely aligned correctness of turned-out limbs, a cantilevered arabesque, square placement, and the ever-pointed toes". Clark (2018:86) argues that one's ability to create these lines is, in part,

what defines dominant perceptions of the ballet body. Importantly, these lines are described not merely as a feature of one's body, but also a product of the particular movement of the body. In other words, ballet is often seen both to build *and* require a particular body. However, this idea certainly implies that the ballet body exists beyond a mere "still body that complies with certain aesthetic criteria" (Clark 2018:86).

Figure 4: *Portrait* Screenshot - Broken lines nr.1 (Leung 2016)

There are moments in which DePrince's movements become rigid and disjointed, almost as if symbolically depicting and communicating a sense of brokenness. In *Portrait*, her hands and arms twist in different directions, her fingers become stiff and her wrists break the long lines that intend to make a ballerina's arms appear ethereal and elegant. *To Be Naked* depicts, at times, similar motions, although not as distinct as in the performance of *Portrait*. Both dances contrast the smooth, continuous flow of certain movements with erratic moments that may not be anticipated. "Line", as one of the aesthetic principles associated with ballet, is artistically and expressively opposed in these movements – the lines of her arms depicting, in particular, what dancers refer to as "broken wrists" (see

Figures 6 and 9). Moreover, these movements are indicative of the neo-classical[17] ballet style, which I discuss later by considering the choreographic work of George Balanchine.

Critical of the popular ideologies that centre around ballet, Fisher (2019:8) contends that deliberation on this art form is complex, often reflective of certain ideals, but importantly also reflective of "individual free will". Perspective is the determining factor, or at least among a number of determining factors, in shaping the outcomes of such deliberation. Positive accounts of ballet do exist. As I intend to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, a multidimensional perspective on body and ballet generously accommodates these positive accounts. Ballet is described by Clark's (2018:77) subjects as an enjoyable means of expressing themselves. The multidimensionality of both body and ballet is evident in the two video clips of DePrince and it is significant to critical interpretation, in order to pave a way for the restoration of these two key subjects.

Commenting on the multidimensionality of dance, Fisher (2019:9) associates ballet with spirituality, arguing that "what … we need most, once a passion like ballet is embraced, is religion". Relating to its multidimensionality, Fisher (2019:10) accepts ballet beyond a physical and sensorial realm, arguing that it unquestionably brings about more than kinaesthetic empathy. Graham (in Eiss 2013:72) explained "the essence of dance [as] the expression of man". Dance, she says, is the landscape of a person's soul – the soul refers to the third dimension of the body, and the capacity of dance to express the soul points to its emotional and spiritual dimension. In associating the third dimension of the body with the metaphysical dimensions of ballet, as pointed out earlier, I collectively refer to this capacity as the inner body-dance dimension.

Importantly, Kate Mattingly (2021:184) asserts that negative perspectives on ballet are a result of "assumptions about ballet", not of ballet in itself. Similarly, Fisher (2019:23) argues that ballet is not capable in itself to determine its absorption and interpretation – in other words the experience thereof by the viewer. She emphasises the significance of individual absorption and interpretation of "the ideas, metaphors, and expectations of"

[17] The neo-classical ballet style is an escape from ballet as based on narratives and romantic elements. It combines traditional technical aspects of ballet with innovative, modern and abstract technical aspects, such as "strong lines, angular shapes, and dynamic contrasts" (Mcananey [sa]).

ballet (or any genre of dance) and the people involved with it (Fisher 2019:23). Pointing to the problematics of the ideologies that determine and critique ballet, Clark (2018:78) argues that, until recently, academic work on the art form is predominantly concerned with the physical appearance of the dancer's body. On the other hand, *what* this body does, *how* it moves and its *experiences* are severely neglected (Clark 2018:78). Pointing to the inner body-dance dimension, Anderson (2021:226) argues that dance facilitates the expression of "human emotion and psychological character". Through this process, the dancer develops an awareness of his/her felt body both cognitively and physically (Anderson 2021:226). Openly speaking to the multidimensionality of the body, Anderson (2021:229) demonstrates that dance involves experience(s) within the body's "philosophical dimensions". This occurs through embodied subjectivity. As proven, Shusterman (in Anderson 2021:242) considers the multidimensionality of the body in dance. The performance of dance does not merely implicate an aesthetic end product for the spectator, but more importantly implicates various "cognitive, aesthetic, and ethical benefits" for the dancer (Anderson 2021:242).

This view challenges the dominant ideology/ies of ballet. Touching, like Fisher, on the multidimensionality of dance, Clark (2018:78) subsequently proposes multiple ways of understanding and interpreting the ballet body, extending beyond the visual. I am, like Clark (2018:78), interested in the way(s) in which the dancer understands his/her own body. *Portrait*, as a representation of self and expression of identity, can be read as such. *To Be Naked* also represents self-expression both through a verbal account (poem) and through movement (dance) that symbolise the experience(s) of becoming/being naked (true self).

Relating to an understanding and becoming of self, the poem and the dance in *To Be Naked* both speak to the distinction between nudity and nakedness, making reference to a stripping bare and becoming naked *beyond* skin, in a symbolic manner. This distinction is affirmed through DePrince's verbal articulation: "nudity has never been nakedness" (Michaela DePrince 2018). Grabher's dimensions can be found in the poem and dance, as the physical nudity of the skin (first dimension) is juxtaposed with becoming naked, vulnerable and true in one's identity and self (third dimension). Resonating deeply with

the dimensions of body and ballet, dance intends to "evoke … [an] awareness of life" and "develop psychological insights" about humanity, by expressing externally an "inner emotional experience" (Eiss 2013:74). Speaking to the body beyond a visual and tangible dimension, DePrince's performance of *Portrait* represents the communication and expression of her "self" through dance. A "portrait" refers to the portrayal or representation of an individual. The dance can therefore be interpreted as a portrait, a piece of art, that comes alive through movement. The dance perhaps symbolises a living, moving portrait of DePrince. Reinforcing a multidimensional perspective on body and dance, this performance is then in essence a portrait or representation of expression through movement as opposed to everyday verbal communication.

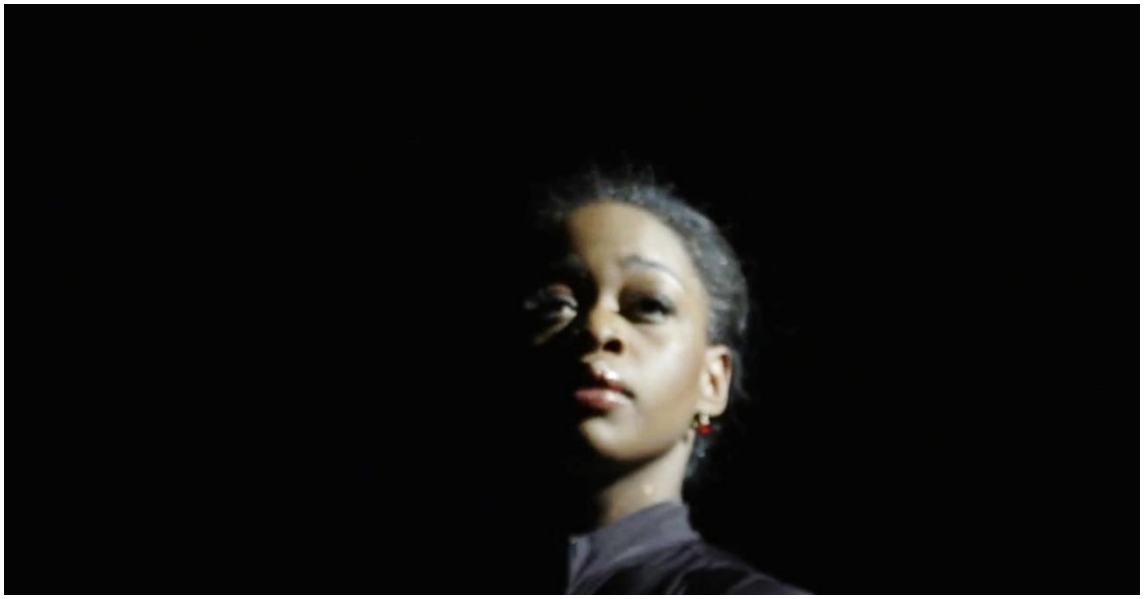

Figure 5: *Portrait* Screenshot - Face (Leung 2016)

Importantly, Clark's research demonstrates how the *dancing* body is an *expressive* body. Pleasure is gained through the expression that is experienced through dance (Clark 2018:93). Ballet aids, according to Clark (2018:93), in expressing one's mood, feelings and state of being that may not be easily (or even possibly) verbalised. As demonstrated by Clark (2018:94) and evident in the analysis of DePrince's dancing, ballet allows individuals to express a variety of emotions that may seem inappropriate, difficult or impossible to communicate outside the space of dance. Ballet's capacity for empowering individuals through expression can be realised in the analysis of DePrince's performance.

Considering moments as captured in Figure 7, it may be easy to plainly describe DePrince's face as expressionless. However, through interpreting the body from a multidimensional perspective, communication with the audience does occur through her face in its multidimensionality – the third dimension certainly seems to seep through the second and first dimensions, through DePrince's eyes, for instance – despite the absence of apparent facial expressions. DePrince's dancing therefore demonstrates the significance of the body's movement and communication beyond the face and first-dimensional elements. Dance, therefore, is a means of expression, allowing the body in its multidimensionality to function as the vehicle for this expression. The dance, in its multidimensionality, functions as the path(s) to such expression. *Portrait* is indicative of this – the spiritual dimension of body and of ballet, and their interconnectedness, come to light in this performance which describes DePrince's *movement* (dance) as her *portrait* (self).

Semiotic significance can be found in the relationship between DePrince's dancing and the music. I wish to describe the music that accompanies *Portrait*, titled *Quiet Music* and composed by Nico Muhly, as it contributes to the viewer's understanding of the performance. I refer to Daniel Johnson's ([sa]) review of the piece in formulating a semiotic description of the piece of music. While there are many hushed breaths in the music, it does not quite allow for a moment of complete silence. The pedals of the piano can be heard in the softness of the music and just as the singing chords fade, they are replaced by new musical resonances. As Johnson puts it, "some points [are] left in shadow while others are brought brilliantly to the fore", creating a "musical chiaroscuro" (Johnson [sa]). These moments are not so much of a silence than a softness in the music, in which DePrince's movement never stops. When the notes are held, her movement is fluid and continuous. Conversely, in moments where her movement is more rigid and irregular, the music fills in any possible gap that may imply discontinuance. Symbolising an emotive and at times conflicting conversation, the movement jumps between the music and the dance. The music and dance can be described through the same juxtaposition as a physical contrast between lightness and darkness. This contrast seen, heard and felt in the performance reminds us of the conflict found in Balanchine's work, which I discuss in this section. Speaking to this embrace of conflict, *Quiet Music* conveys and evokes an

"emotional quiescence" (Johnson [sa]). This idea is also related, once again, to the absence of apparent facial expression(s), signifying a sense of calmness and stillness in the dance – contrasted with the restlessness of her always-moving body.

Fisher (2019:29) considers ballet's meta-physical dimension in claiming that Balanchine's choreography has become "meaningful to [her] as religion". In a fabulous amalgamation of Russian, American and African culture and artistic qualities, Balanchine connected two opposing worlds through dance. Trained as a Russian dancer, while working and producing ballet in a western culture, Balanchine also embraced Africanism through music and dance, transforming the traditionally known style of ballet (Fisher 2019:29). Brenda Dixon Gottschild (in Fisher 2019:29) exposes and explores the style of Balanchine, demonstrating its "embodied links to basic aesthetic tenets of West Africa". Indeed, creating an expansion and critique of narrow ideological perspectives of ballet, she associates his style with a "youthful attack", an "embrace of conflicting energies, angled arms" and "pedestrian gestures" (Fisher 2019:29). Figures 8 and 9 capture moments in both video clips that depict such a style.

Figure 6: *Portrait* Screenshot - Broken lines nr.2 (Leung 2016)

DePrince's dancing both in *Portrait* and *To Be Naked* can be compared to Balanchine's choreographic style. Smooth, graceful *port de bras* (arm movement), lifts of the leg(s) and moments of suspension in the air or *en pointe* are contrasted with erratic, more rigid and sudden kicks, turns, jumps or runs. Particularly evident in the choreography of *Portrait*, DePrince's arms break what has been described as "line", creating shapes and patterns that can be likened to the choreography and style of Balanchine. Both dances are neo-classical in nature, associating with Balanchine and the American Ballet style that emerged from his work. Common notions of ballet as prejudiced against people of different races and ethnicities are countered upon exploring Balanchine's work. Similarly, the two video clips can be seen as a powerful and empowering artistic performance by DePrince, in that they represent her "self" in two opposing worlds that are brought together through dance. Her skin colour, but moreover her perceived difference due to her vitiligo, amplify this unification of conflicting ideology and culture.

Figure 7: *To Be Naked* Screenshot - Broken lines nr.3 (Michaela DePrince 2018)

Daly (in Clark 2018:79) criticises ballet in asserting its roots lie "in an ideology which denies women their own agency". While Daly is concerned with gender inequality, I

believe this thought extends to other marginalised groups, such as individuals with disfigurement and disability. Ballet is said to fail in understanding individuals that do not conform to certain standards (Fisher 2019:5). Examining DePrince for the message she conveys, and not for her "decorative appearance", is taking a significant step towards countering the ideologies and negative perspectives on ballet and body (Fisher 2019:35). The viewer sees her for what she chooses to express and communicate, not for the adornment and decoration so often associated with ballet. Ballet therefore grants DePrince agency in what she represents, as opposed to allowing the representational demands of the mentioned ideologies to control her performance. Analysing the two video clips therefore aids in formulating a different, restorative perspective on ballet, opposing the stereotypes and myths that too often saturate discussions, perceptions and interpretations of the art form. Dominant ideologies associated with ballet are shaped by dominant (mis)perceptions of the body (Clark 2018:80). A need to expand on the understanding of the body has emerged, taking into account dancers' own experiences of ballet and their dancing bodies (Clark 2018:80). Perceptions and interpretations of the body in ballet are based on "a set of multiple discourses" (Clark 2018:81). Recognising the insufficiency of those discourses that have dominated the meaning and interpretation of the body in dance, Clark (2018:82) seeks to identify instead *multiple* meanings and interpretations of this body.

A disruption of the dominant aesthetic myths and stereotypes of ballet can take place through negotiations and reflections thereof (Clark 2018:87). Clark's (2018:88) analysis proved that the practice and performance of ballet are not conditional on dominant aesthetic ideals. Similar to Clark's (2018:87) subjects, DePrince demonstrates an acceptance of her own body by acknowledging her "personal contextual [reality]". In moving past aesthetic ideals, DePrince's dancing is testament of ballet's positive impacts. Her engagement with the art form offers her the opportunity to build an understanding, interpretation and perception of her body in multiple, affirmative ways (Clark 2018:91). The poem in *To Be Naked* reinforces the creation of self-identity. Dance, according to Noémie Solomon (in Cenci 2018), is a two-directional conversation, engaging all of the senses, heightening feelings and expressions of bodies in various spaces and in relation to other bodies. This statement can be related again to the conversational elements found

in *Portrait* in the relationship between the music and the dance – as well as the relationship, rather than separation, between the dancer and the spectator.

There are various symbolic connotations to be explored in *To Be Naked*. DePrince's presence in the ruins of a city suffering from constant hostilities and political tensions is reminiscent of her dreadful childhood in war-torn Sierra Leone. The dance can thus be seen as a confrontation of her past, a return – both literal and spiritual – to war and to a vulnerable self. The dust on her skin may represent DePrince's vitiligo. The act of willingly rubbing it on her body and her costume is an important part of the dance. Artistically, like the painter with his brush, this can be seen as DePrince playfully accepting, befriending, her difference. It is perhaps symbolic of an acceptance of her past, of the damaging consequences that her appearance implied. Before this play with dust, DePrince relates becoming-of-self with the sensation of "the unzipping of skin … to feel it fall … like a dress slipping off" (Michaela DePrince 2018). As she narrates this verse, she wipes down her arms as if taking off an invisible dress, after which she starts moving and dancing in the dust (see Figure 10).

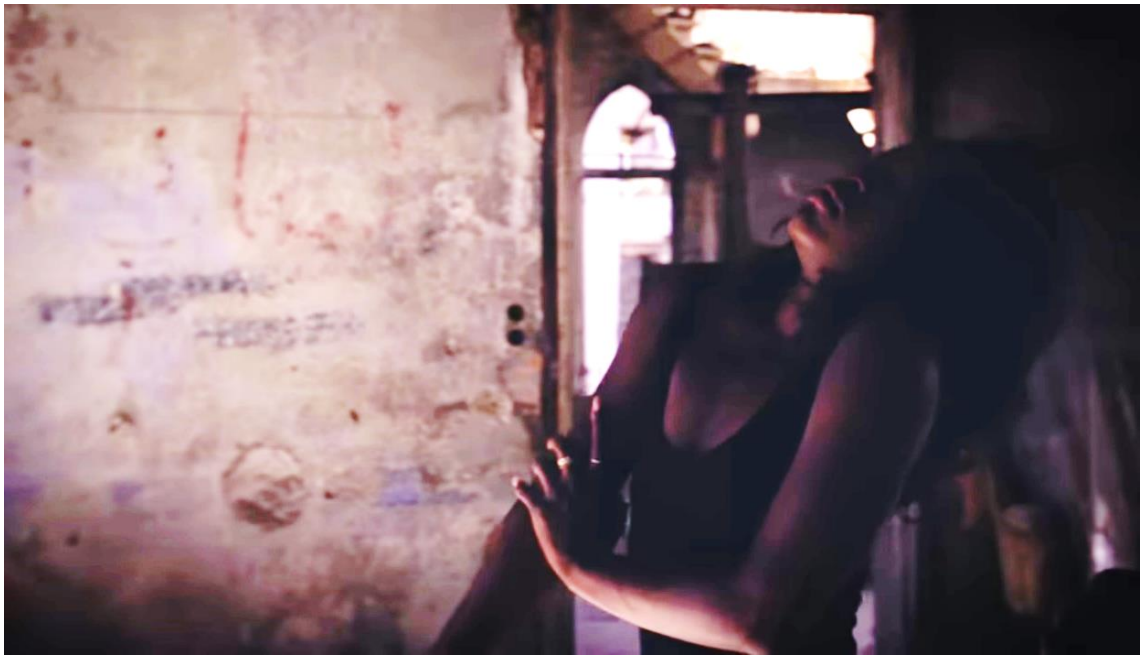

Figure 8: *To Be Naked* Screenshot - "Like a dress slipping off" (Michaela DePrince 2018)

Dust, in this film, could be said to symbolie vitiligo, or more generally disfigurement. It is shown to be manipulable and mouldable. While the dust/vitiligo can also arguably be represented as superficial, unable to penetrate the skin, the process of "unzipping" of her skin earlier on may be seen as the unzipping of her surface (first dimension). The dust/vitiligo is also found in a deeper dimension. The playfulness with which she applies the dust to her skin and moves around in it, implies an acceptance of her condition beyond the first and second dimension. While in a literal sense, vitiligo only runs skin-deep, this dance depicts the ways in which disfigurement can penetrate through to one's third dimension – whether by rejection or acceptance thereof. In these movements, captured in Figures 11 and 12, DePrince is seen to befriend her condition and accept her naked, true self.

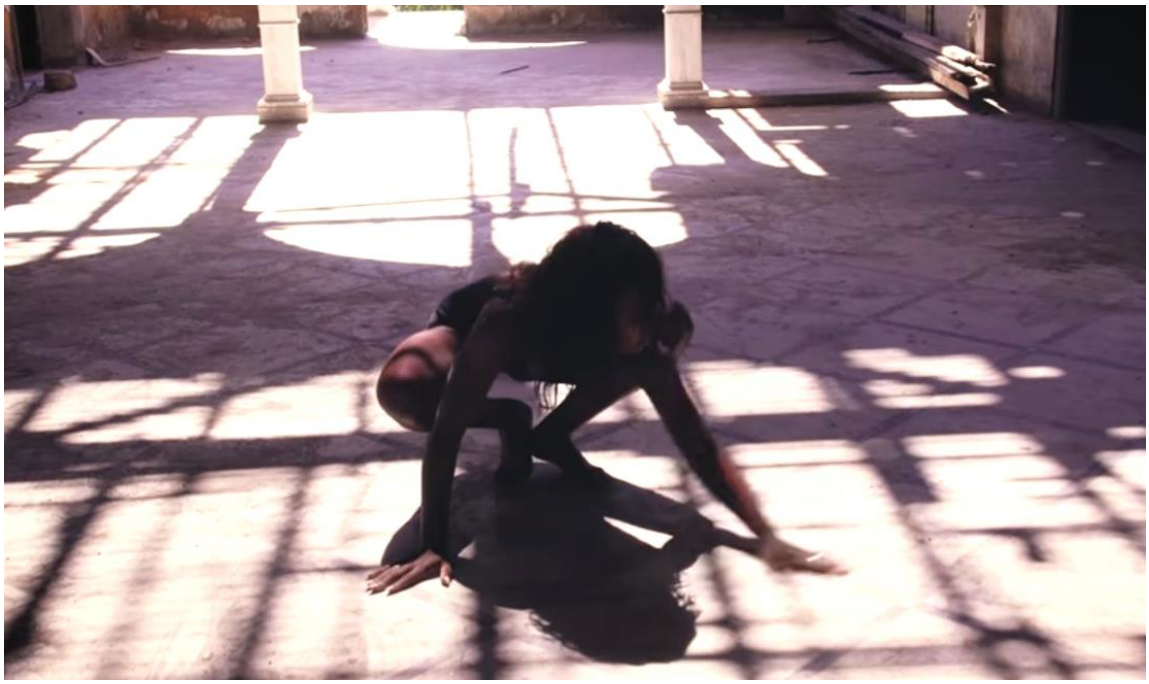

Figure 9: *To Be Naked* Screenshot - Play with dust nr.1 (Michaela DePrince 2018)

Figure 10: *To Be Naked* Screenshot - Play with dust nr.2 (Michaela DePrince 2018)

The ending of the poem in *To Be Naked* marks a second section, the development if you will, of the music. In yet another confrontation of traditions associated with ballet, DePrince dances to a suggestive electronic piece of music. Through the recital of the poem, DePrince speaks of a desire to become oneself and express oneself. Following the lyric, she employs movement – dance – to express herself and to formulate an understanding of her own body, in its multidimensionality. Speaking to the fact that physical and psychological capabilities are disparate, and that a kind of beauty is found in brokenness, the poem expresses: “in the wreckage is the craft” (Michaela DePrince 2018).

Figure 11: *To Be Naked* Screenshot 7 - "In the wreckage is the craft" (Michaela DePrince 2018)

Linking the elements found in the building with the performance – the building sheets, furniture, dust, wooden panels – there is hope for restoration (see Figure 13). As the building is possibly under new construction, so is the body seemingly always an entity under construction. The peeling walls covered in unsightly patches can also be compared to social perceptions of DePrince's skin condition. Furthermore, the ruins surrounding her also represent an internal ruin, a brokenness caused by the cruel consequences of DePrince's disfigurement. Yet, through her dance, her play with dust and her ease of movement, however simplistic, *To Be Naked* depicts the beauty that can be found in brokenness. The simplicity referred to reintroduces the "pedestrian" qualities found in Balanchine's work. The poem and dance in this video clip are illustrative of the process of becoming-self (inner body-dance dimension). Therefore, the poem and dance, in an embrace of multidimensionality, point to the powerful and empowering capacities of ballet.

Clark's (2018:95) study exposes multiple meanings that oppose dominant ideologies, myths and stereotypes of the dancer and the art of ballet, enabling a broader interpretation of what the body means in ballet, beyond aesthetics (first dimension). Perceiving and

interpreting the (moving) body in different and diverse ways can serve as a confrontation and disruption of dominant understandings not only of the ballet body, but of ballet in itself (Clark 2018:95-97). In the same way, interpreting the two video clips from a multidimensional perspective, the ideologies that govern social perceptions, interpretations and definitions of body and ballet can be defied.

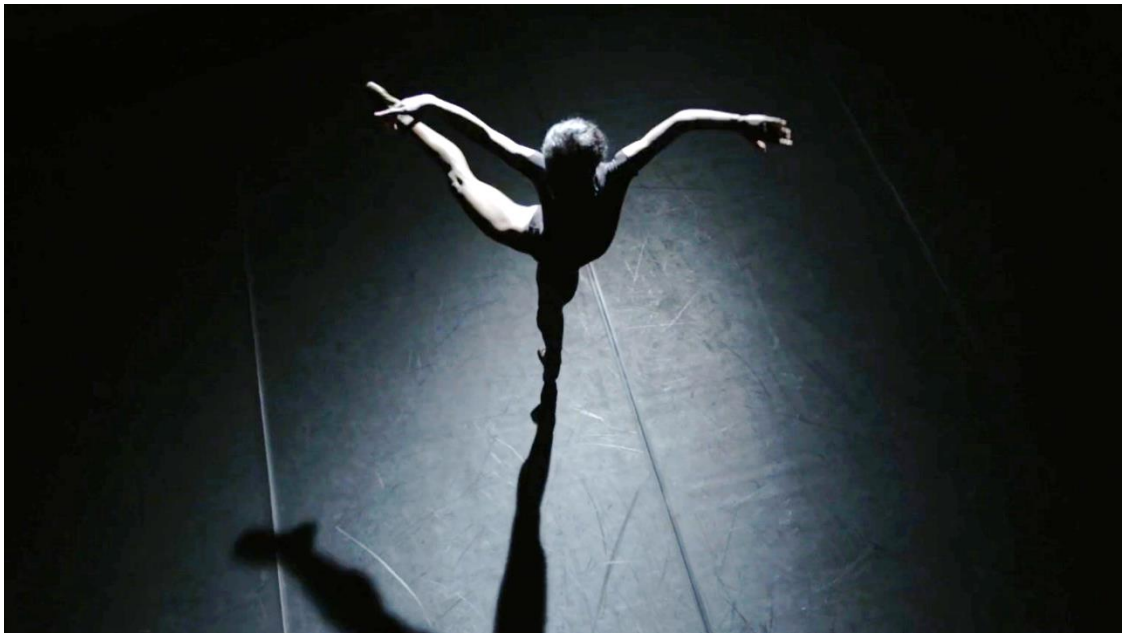

Figure 12: *Portrait* Screenshot - Black & white nr.1 (Leung 2016)

The symbolism of colour adds to the semiotic significance that can be found in both video clips. In *To Be Naked*, DePrince's surroundings are bleak, grey and lifeless, except for some greenery that can be seen outside (see Figure 13). Life and lifelessness are separated. Only nature was capable of survival in this town – human constructions did not survive. While it may be argued that DePrince is separated from this greenery and symbol of life in a washed-out place, one can also perceive her as that which is living among the dead. The music keeps rising as DePrince's movements become more progressive. She comes alive in her movement, contrasting with the lifeless atmosphere in which she dances. As mentioned, DePrince is seen dancing merely in a plain, black leotard signifying, perhaps at first, solemnness, a sense of grief, even fear. Black, generally considered the absence of light, is from a western perspective often associated with negative connotations, such as fear, unknown and mourning (Yu 2014:66). Yet, with

the progression of the music and movement in *To Be Naked*, this blackness may symbolise power and strength.

Relating to many non-western symbolic views of the colour black, it can also be associated with processes of rebirth and resurrection, and represents dignity, relating to the becoming of and representation of self in both video clips (Yu 2014:66). The colour black is prominent in *Portrait*, bluntly contrasted with white (see Figures 14 and 15) – this particular video is intentionally produced in an almost entirely black (background) and white (lighting) scene. White is often regarded as "the absolute [colour] of light", symbolising "truth, purity, innocence … the sacred or divine" (Yu 2014:64). While this does not always imply a negative semiotic approach to black, the two are nevertheless contrasted (Yu 2014:67). As in the previous visual example, black may signify power and strength, but at the same time a certain mysterious elegance that is seen and felt in DePrince's graceful, yet at times eccentric, movements. Again, through considering the contrast in colour, it becomes clear that the embrace of conflicting energies can be found in the performances by DePrince, representing the coherence of two opposing worlds and the transformative capabilities of ballet.

Figure 13: *Portrait* Screenshot - Black & white nr.2 (Leung 2016)

The video clips, defying mythologies and stereotypes of disfigurement, demonstrate an opposing representation thereof compared to those pointed out by Frances (2012). DePrince is not represented as negative, a voiceless object, evil or non-conforming in any way (Frances 2012:119). Novack (in Fisher 2019:8) considered the ballet world as "an embodied practice, an art form, and a cultural force", associating it with dominant views that focus on "gender expectations, social consciousness, ethnicity, race, and aesthetic preference". It is frequently depicted by critics as "elitist, exclusionary and impossibly old-fashioned". These perspectives may point to racial and aesthetic bodily exclusion (Fisher 2019:5). In my pursuit of approaching ballet and disfigurement from a multidimensional perspective, these exclusive ideologies surrounding both subjects – ballet and the atypical or non-conforming body – can be challenged and overcome. This analysis intended to explore DePrince's dancing by acknowledging her, according to Mattingly (2021:184), "as an individual with a unique physical structure, intellectual capacity, and emotional range" – in other words, by acknowledging her in her first, second and third dimensions.

3.3 Joe Powell-Main

3.3.1 Hermeneutic Analysis

Growing up in Wales, Joe Powell-Main[18] made his first encounter with ballet at the age of five. As a young child, he trained with the Royal Ballet School, as well as performed and toured with Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Royal Ballet Company (My Story [sa]). Powell-Main's life and (aspiring) career in dance were turned upside down when he suffered an injury to his knee. He underwent surgical repair, which yielded an unfavourable outcome. Not long after, the dancer was also involved in a vehicle accident, resulting in further injury and leaving him with permanent impaired mobility (Harding 2021). Only three years later, Powell-Main returned to dance with the aid of a wheelchair, by attending different genres of dance classes, which soon grew into a professional

[18] Born 31 May 1998. At the age of four, Powell-Main started attending tap and modern dance classes with his sister, Holly. His dance teacher realised his potential and suggested ballet classes. Following her advice, Powell-Main started with ballet at the age of five and soon realised his love for the art form. He pursued ballet until the age of fourteen, when he obtained his first or initial injury (My Story [sa]).

career[19] (My Story [sa]). I wish to analyse Powell-Main's life and story, through exploration of his personal accounts and experiences, within the critical framework proposed in Chapter Two. The analysis that follows makes use of internet and magazine articles, interviews on social media and in the news, as well as information found on Powell-Main's website.

3.3.1.1 From Cabrioles to Crutches

Powell-Main attended his first ballet class with his sister when he was five years old. Within two years, demonstrating remarkable talent, he was accepted into "the Royal Ballet School Junior associate programme" for training (My Story [sa]). Here, Powell-Main had the wonderful opportunity to perform with the Birmingham Royal Ballet in their professional productions and participate in company tours (My Story [sa]). He was ten years of age when "the Royal Ballet School Lower School" accepted him into their programme, where he received intensive training for four years. During this time, Powell-Main was fortunate enough to perform with the Royal Ballet on several occasions (My Story [sa]). However, his journey with the Royal Ballet School and company was short-lived and came to an unfortunate end when he suffered an injury to his knee. Surgical attempts to repair the injury sadly gave rise to post-operative complications. Powell-Main suffered further injury after being involved in a vehicle accident. He was left with no muscular activity in the affected leg (My Story [sa]). Three daunting, dance-less years followed. Powell-Main then made the decision to return to dance with the aid of a wheelchair, participating in classes for different genres of dance in Manchester, England (My Story [sa]). This analysis explores the life of Powell-Main as an individual and a dancer with disability, taking into account his own experiences. I both rely on and critique theories, notions and ideas that were introduced in Chapter Two, such as: the multidimensionality of body and dance; social perspectives on, and consequences of,

[19] Powell-Main's successful projects and collaborations, following his injuries, include competing in various competitions and earning the title "UK National Para Dance Champion in Solo Freestyle" as well as "Combi Freestyle" (alongside his sister) (My Story [sa]). Powell-Main became noticeably active and popular on social media, leading him directly to *Ballet Cymru*. After participating in the company's 2018 "Summer School as a scholarship participant", he joined the company – first as an apprentice, and soon after (2020) as a professional (My Story [sa]). Powell-Main is also actively involved as patron, ambassador and advocate in a number of projects that strive for inclusion.

bodily difference; notions of ableism and disability in the world of ballet; the power of performance; opportunities for inclusion and empowerment in ballet.

Powell-Main's post-operative complications and subsequent long-term impairment of the initial injury – although not entirely to blame for his disability, for the accident that followed severely worsened these already existing complications – offer space for meaningful reflections on processes of reconstruction. Refiguring or reconstructing the body relates to a physical and an aesthetic process. The notion of reconstruction ought not be mistaken for a synonym of restoration, for this latter term involves a multidimensional body and a multidimensional repair process that extends beyond the physical and/or visible body. *Refigurement* can concisely be defined as the process of "fixing" what is "broken". Heather Talley (2014:148) remarks that the severity of the impairment often dictates the outcome of the repair process, meaning that 1) repair may only take place to a certain extent, 2) there may be post-repair sequelae or after-effects (such as scarring on or colouration of the skin) and, in Powell-Main's case 3) repair processes may be unsuccessful to certain extents. Demonstrating not merely the insufficiency of medical reparation but also the possibility that it may (however rare) be unsuccessful all together, these processes can be argued to have been ineffective in Powell-Main's case. It is unclear, however, whether the surgical procedures did in fact repair the injury, but led to different complications, or whether the surgical procedures in themselves were unsuccessful in treating the initial injury. Nevertheless, and in either case, the limitations of medical reconstruction and reparation are clear, in its (possible) failure to repair as well as in its (possible) inability to restore the body multidimensionally. As noted, following these incidents, Powell-Main's impairment deteriorated even further due to a vehicle accident.

Given that these incidents resulted in the loss of muscular activity in his leg, it becomes clear that Powell-Main's injuries, resulting in impaired mobility, physically disabled him (Harding 2021). Building on the theoretical understandings of disability offered by Thomas, I demonstrate in this analysis that Powell-Main can be considered disabled both through the lens of medical sociology – disability results from illness and impairment – and the lens of disability studies – disability results from exclusion and inequality

(Thomas 2004:569-570). Although there are numerous discourses that seek to understand and define disability, a central conclusion can be formulated: dominant social understandings of disability reinforce the ab/normality binary and prove to frequently position individuals with disabilities in a negative light (Eisenhauer 2007:11). In this dissertation's endeavour to construct a new perspective on disability, disfigurement and ballet, such bodily difference must be understood and analysed in terms of multidimensionality.

Not only did Powell-Main remain (due to initial injury) and become (due to the accident) physically impaired, more significantly his body can be seen as *multidimensionally* damaged during this period of his life. From a multidimensional perspective on the body, it is clear that his first and second dimensions were affected by his injuries. Within his second dimension, he suffers from impaired mobility and a lack of muscular activity (Harding 2021). Consequently, Powell-Main is dependent on the use of a wheelchair or crutches in order to move effectively, deeming in turn his first dimension atypical. Powell-Main's third dimension is also shown to be affected by his injuries as he is said to have believed at the time that these injuries would prevent him from ever dancing again (Harding 2021). In an interview, Powell-Main states that "when I thought [dancing] was no longer a possibility, it was really, really difficult for me to comprehend" (Harding 2021). Interviews, articles and news reports on Powell-Main's journey are indicative of his intense passion for ballet, a topic that is integral to this dissertation. Powell-Main comments on his relationship with dance, connecting his experience in dance and ballet with his inner-being. He links dancing to his feelings and identity, claiming that while pursuing ballet was a difficult path as a child, it was a path worth taking (Harding 2021). Powell-Main explains, "[T]he fact that you had dance would make everything okay … it was almost a way of releasing everything for me" (Harding 2021). Given the emotional and spiritual nature of these remarks, the multidimensionality of ballet is revealed. Powell-Main explicitly associates ballet with his third dimension ("inner-being" and "identity"), speaking also to the inner body-dance dimension that has been established through the connection of body and ballet in their shared multidimensionality. It can therefore be argued that, in being emotionally and spiritually connected with ballet,

Powell-Main's injuries, separating him from dance, negatively affected him through all three his bodily dimensions.

Beyond the inner body-dance connection that positions ballet as intimately crucial to Powell-Main's identity and self, the restorative possibilities that have been realised and found in ballet serve as a general and collective explanation for his (and others') desire to associate with the art form. Topf (in Dixon 2009:85) speaks to these possibilities, claiming dance as an avenue for (re)discovering feeling. In Dixon's (2009:93-94) study, relating to the multidimensionality of body and ballet, both an emotional centre *and* physical centre were identified as the source of all movement (in dance). Based on the literature that has been explored and reviewed, as well as the analyses and arguments that have started to take shape throughout this dissertation, it is clear that participation in the performing arts – including the art of ballet – offers "a space for expression [while creating] images of pride and strength" (le Roux *et al* 2021:2). In turn, such opportunities present a confrontation of dominant social perceptions that view these individuals as fragile, weak and dependent (le Roux *et al* 2021:2). Kleiner's theories also correspond with a favourable view on ballet that positions it as a potentially important and effective vehicle for empowerment. The space of performance, in allowing for expression, creativity and a loss of self-consciousness, allows for the experience of ballet as rewarding (Kleiner 2009:250-251). Kleiner's approach to ballet and the experience of performance expertly addresses both the surveillance of bodies and the constructive elements of ballet – offering thus a thorough evaluation of this space and the potentials of ballet.

The destigmatising, inclusive and empowering capacities of ballet in Powell-Main's life, and to other individuals as well, are thus clear. Yet, from societal perspectives that fail to consider body and ballet in multidimensional terms, individuals with difference such as Powell-Main still face stigmatisation and discrimination. I therefore emphasise the importance of considering both ballet and the body in their full dimensionality – in other words, considering all aspects and complete capacities that extend beyond the visible, tangible or corporeal. A multidimensional perspective on body and ballet may create a pathway for the restoration of both subjects as well as to demonstrate the ways in which

ballet, from this perspective, affirms, includes and empowers individuals/dancers with bodies that are deemed abnormal.

Fiona Campbell (2009:29) shows that perceptions of performers with disabilities have been improving over time, and, while open to criticism, institutions that showcase these individuals are central to the transformation of such perceptions. Campbell (2009:28) refers to "integrated dance companies" to categorise organisations such as Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels, founded in 1980, and CandoCo, founded in 1991 – both examples of how changes in the social perceptions of disability in performing arts have been taking place. Melvin Delgado and Denise Humm-Delgado (2017:106) also assert that "there are many notable examples of full inclusion of youth with disabilities in the performing arts", while acknowledging that this alone does not facilitate complete restoration – it is but a step in the right direction. As said to Vanessa Harris (2019), Powell-Main expresses his feelings about re-entering the dancing world as a person with a disability: "[i]t was great to see that it was still an opportunity for me and how I could approach ballet with the knowledge that I gained beforehand, but then also approach it in a new way, and see how I could explore that".

3.3.1.2 Re-Becoming Dancer

After approximately three years of living timidly, disabled and dance-less, Powell-Main made the decision to return to his passion with the aid of a wheelchair, participating initially in classes for different genres of dance in Manchester, England (My Story [sa]). He attended classes through the Wheelchair Dance Association, reawakening his passion for dancing as well as giving him the opportunity and inspiration to rebuild his pursuit of a ballet career (Harding 2021). According to interview(s), this experience allowed him to once again pursue his dancing ambitions and, before long, Powell-Main entered in competitions. He competed in and won the title of "the UK National Para Dance Champion" in selected categories (My Story [sa]). Later, Powell-Main's love for ballet was even further restored when he embarked on an academic journey, completing "a degree in Dance and Performance at the *Arden School of Theatre* in Manchester" (My Story [sa]). In his free time, he started to become active on social media, in an attempt to build relationships with other dancers with disabilities. Powell-Main's activity on social

media platforms proved to be effective, acquainting him with Ballet Cymru, a classical ballet company based in Newport, South Wales (My Story [sa]). Significantly, the company is known for its mission "to change perceptions of ballet" (Fairclough 2021). Ballet Cymru is a ballet organisation that strives for inclusivity and diversity. The company invited Powell-Main to attend a Summer School in 2018, where he had the opportunity to enter for a scholarship programme. Consequently, he received his apprenticeship through the company's Pre-Professional course, after which he joined the main company in the year 2020 (My Story [sa]). The artistic director of Ballet Cymru, Darius James, states that he would often invite and encourage people to attend the productions of the company in which Powell-Main (among others) performed, so that it could open the public's eyes to the diversity that can be found in ballet, and so that they might "see that it actually is ballet … back to the roots" (Fairclough 2021).

At the age of 23, among his continuously growing accomplishments in the ballet world as a dancer with disability, Powell-Main performed in collaboration with the Royal Ballet, a world renowned company based in London, England (Harding 2021). Through this affair, he became known as "the first dancer using a wheelchair and crutches to perform with the Royal Ballet", a significant achievement not merely in an individual sense, but moreover in representing any and all aspiring dancers who live with disability/ies (Powell-Main Website). This memorable performance took place during "the Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony at Wembley Arena", England, where Powell-Main danced alongside some of the Royal Ballet company dancers and the English singer-songwriter best known by her stage name as Birdy (My Story [sa]). Powell-Main is furthermore credited for co-creating the piece with Kristen McNally, a Principal character artist with the Royal Ballet. The event intended to celebrate and honour Great Britain's Paralympic athletes and their achievements in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. The piece was danced to a song performed live by Birdy, titled "Nobody knows me like you do" (My Story [sa]). Powell-Main remarks in an interview with ITV News (2021) that the Royal Ballet company welcomed him and offered complete support to him and his disability. This comment is of the essence, in that it speaks to an acceptance and embrace of (bodily) diversity and the representation thereof in one of the world's most prestigious professional ballet companies.

Nevertheless, despite efforts for inclusion and diversity, classical dancers (ballet) with disability (or disfigurement) are scarce – particularly in the professional world of dance. According to Eisenhauer (2007:20), problematic social models and conventions regarding "disability culture and representation" have not received adequate scrutiny and interrogation in relation to other marginalised groups in the field of art. Eisenhauer (2007:20) subsequently calls for a re-orientation of the discourse that regards disability in the arts, in order to achieve sufficient integration of the various models that serve to address ableism. This approach is believed to have the capacity for changing the space of the studio or class, to resist ideologies that discriminate, stigmatise and marginalise individuals with disabilities (Eisenhauer 2007:20). Powell-Main himself notes in an interview that the lack of other professional dancers like him may be so as a consequence of ideology. However, and importantly, he claims that his experience of performing with the Royal Ballet proves otherwise. It is indeed possible, he says, to pursue ballet as an individual with disability or disfigurement (Harding 2021). I wish to stress the purpose of this study: to propose a multidimensional, and therefore a potentially restorative, perspective on body and ballet, which in itself reveals numerous (other) aspects of ballet that may promote inclusivity, diversity and opportunities for empowerment for all individuals (including those living with disfigurement and disability).

Powell-Main also recalls the difficulties that came with accepting and managing his disability in isolation. While remarking that disability in professional dance is still in developing stages, Powell-Main hopes that his exposure through performing with the Royal Ballet – as well as, by now, more recent undertakings – would be eye-opening on an international level, encouraging dancers with disabilities to pursue their passions (Harding 2021). Powell-Main declares that his hope is to inspire a rise in wheelchair dancers within the genre of ballet through sharing his journey. Noting the many social and political barriers that serve to prevent this development, Powell-Main's performance at the Paralympic homecoming event focused in particular on communicating this goal (Harding 2021).

Powell-Main argues that "[s]ometimes it doesn't look like conventional ballet – people in [pointe] shoes, legs up by their ears … but there needs to be a willingness to look beyond

that and see that [it is] different" (Fairclough 2021). This statement casually and subtly addresses the risk of reliance merely on the visual/aesthetic and tangible/physical aspects of body and ballet. Powell-Main may require the aid of a chair or crutches, thus doing ballet in a different way, yet it is nevertheless *ballet*. In an interview with BBC News Wales, he expresses his desire that people would look beyond his wheelchair or his crutches and recognise instead his identity, his story and his art (Fairclough 2021). On this note, let us consider Powell-Main's experience of ballet as a dancer with disability in terms of multidimensionality.

Dominant ideologies underscore certain physical characteristics as essential to the ballet body (Clark 2018:79). Similar to the objectives of this dissertation and nudging towards a multidimensional perspective of the body, Clark (2018:82) recognises various meanings of the (ballet) body. As noted, Clark's (2018:85) investigation demonstrated numerous "nuanced and thoughtful reflections about the meanings of the ballet body" as well as processes of "actively [negotiating] multiple understandings about [one's own] dancing [body]". Like Clark's participants, Powell-Main has accepted his body, acknowledging his personal truth and reality. Pointing to further ways of perceiving and interpreting the body in ballet, Clark (2018:95) seeks to challenge dominant understandings thereof, instead arguing for the importance of "multiple meanings" when it comes to the body. The means for achieving and accepting multiple meanings of the body, I argue, lies within the construction of a perspective on the body that extends beyond the visual and the physical. By taking into account the third dimension of the body, it is possible to produce a definition of each body that does not merely rely upon what the body *appears* to be. A purely visual and physical interpretation of the body fails to consider the body in its entirety and may prove to be stereotypical and biased, for it commonly relies upon dominant social beliefs and ideologies. Delgado and Humm-Delgado (2017:106-107) declare the risks of perceiving "youth with disabilities as one dimensional", arguing that doing so results in a definition of these individuals that considers only their disability, while failing to take into account their identities. They call for an intersectional approach that appreciates these individuals in all aspects regarding personal experiences and characteristics. Importantly, Delgado and Humm-Delgado (2017:110) regard these individuals, and all others, as multidimensional. The previous section of this analysis

considered Powell-Main's multidimensional body. I now consider the multidimensionality of ballet.

The *bodily* (*physical*) dimension of ballet, perhaps the most visible and obvious among its dimensions, is evident in moments such as Powell-Main's presumed inability to dance due to his acquired disability, and the physicality of his use of a wheelchair and crutches in his dancing. It is here important to distinguish between ballet's use of the body and dominant beliefs that associate this body with disfigurement and disability. Powell-Main's "presumed inability" does not stand for the physical dimension of ballet, but rather the tangibility of the body itself. While I continuously emphasise the importance of a third dimension, I do not imply that a body can or must exist without a first and second dimension. Rather, this dissertation's focus is on providing a perspective that is accepting and understanding of various *appearances of* the body's first and second dimensions – as opposed to the mere *existence of* these dimensions. In other words, the physical dimension of ballet relies upon the first and second dimensions of the body, yet not on social interpretations of aesthetic *dys*/appearance or dis/ability.

The *cognitive* dimension of ballet, concerned with mental functioning such as perception and memory, is revealed in Powell-Main's account when he continuously refers back to his childhood – a time in which his preparation for becoming a professional ballet dancer started – as well as in his general experience of ballet, his earlier perceptions of possibly not being able to dance and finally, his perception of dance today as an individual with disability. As argued by Hanna (1995:324), thought and feeling are produced in dance through the cognitive dimension. The *emotional* dimension of ballet is made clear in Powell-Main's expressive account of his relationship with the art form. Powell-Main tells the PA News Agency: "I poured my heart and soul into dance and ballet … it was everything I did" (Harding 2021). Powell-Main also states in a preview of a production titled *Sleepwalker*, in which he recently featured, that "[p]erformance makes me feel alive" (Joseph Isaac Powell – Main 2023).

As seen above, my analysis on Powell-Main takes his personal, subjective experience and feelings into account, elements that, according to Hanna (1995:324), make up the

emotional dimension of dance. The *cultural* dimension of ballet can be seen in the negative responses that Powell-Main has received in making the decision to return to dance as a person with disability. Once again, I note that this does not imply that ballet is responsible for these views. Rather, it means that any social, political or cultural view on ballet – whether positive or negative – speaks to the fact that ballet organisations comprise a number of shared principles (Hanna 1995:324). As noted, ballet is capable of liberating an individual from feelings of exclusion and alienation from society – and by extension, from him/herself – due to his/her perceived abnormality. This occurs through the *religious* or *spiritual* dimension of dance that allows "altered states of consciousness and … metaphysical-physical experience" – in turn, offering a sense of inclusion and (re)identification (Hanna 1995:325). This can also be seen in Powell-Main's experience of performing in *Sleepwalker*, claiming that "the movement of the piece makes me feel quite strong and powerful" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). In addition, Powell-Main expresses that "hopefully, when people see the piece they can … see a bit more of my personality" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). These comments illustrate the potential of ballet to positively affect one's self-perception and self-identification, as well as present an opportunity for self-representation and empowerment. Indicative of the multidimensionality of ballet, Clark's (2018:93) subjects "described the importance of expressing themselves through their bodies and the pleasure they derived from doing so. Dance, according to these subjects, served as a medium for expressing "moods and states of being that could not be put into words" (Clark 2018:93).

The theories proposed by Kleiner (2009:251) have proven to offer a space for 1) the validation of ballet in its essence on the part of the spectator and, subsequently 2) a thrilling and exciting experience for the performer. According to my interpretation of Kleiner's (2009:251-253) theory, in this space, the dancer need not perceive him/herself as different or, as Mead puts it, as other. The power of performance is illustrated in Powell-Main's accounts of his experience as a professional dancer. When asked about his performance with the Royal Ballet at the Paralympic event, Powell-Main excitedly declared that it was "the best experience I've ever had" (ITV News 2021). Other touching remarks demonstrate his positive, affirmative and empowering experience on stage:

> Outside of being on the stage I tend to keep everything quite close to my chest so I can be quite a guarded person sometimes… but then when I'm on stage that guard kind of completely drops (Joseph Isaac … 2023).

In this statement, the powerful experience of performing ballet is once again manifested. Moreover, Powell-Main addresses the fact that ballet offers him the platform for expressing and becoming (him)self in ways he is not able to outside of this space. My analysis of Powell-Main intended to demonstrate a perspective on body and ballet that allows for thorough, multidimensional consideration of both subjects with the purpose of providing a pathway towards the restoration of ballet, disability and disfigurement.

Despite the stigma that surrounds those who live with disability or disfigurement, Powell-Main determinedly pursues a professional career as a differently-abled ballet dancer (as he calls himself). "I know that I'm made for dance", says Powell-Main (Joseph Isaac … 2023). In a panel discussion with the Royal Opera House (2021), Powell-Main claims that "people have this idea that classical ballet is only for a select group of people". He continues, arguing that a different perspective is needed in order to break the stigma and marginalisation of individuals with bodily difference. During this discussion, Powell-Main speaks of the representation of artists in our current day and age, pointing to the fact that, at any given era, dancers represent the population of that same era. Significantly, Powell-Main states that this is precisely what captures the interest of the audience – relatability and realistic representation are two key concepts that uphold this interest (Royal Opera House 2021). Accordingly, linking with Collins *et al's* work, he calls for a more substantial effort in breaking down dominant ideologies that dictate and obstruct the access, representation, inclusion – and subsequently, empowerment – of marginalised, othered individuals.

Powell-Main notes that the way he dances "might look a little different to what [people] are used to seeing", however he believes that this is precisely what makes his dancing exciting (Royal Opera … 2021). Audiences' perceptions of Powell-Main prove to be positive and many remark that he is "quite a big presence on the stage" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Interestingly producing a sense of the traditional desired aesthetic of ballet – while also confronting it by elements such as the use of the wheelchair and crutches, as well as

unconventional ballet attire – Alexander Campbell (director of *Sleepwalker*), in discussing the production of *Sleepwalker*, describes Powell-Main's dancing as "gliding paranormal movement", speaking of his "spirit-like ability to just … glide across the space" (Joseph Isaac … 2023).

The performing arts, comprising ballet, can be seen as "an avenue for both inclusion and empowerment" of individuals with disabilities (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:106). It offers both empowerment through action and through offering a platform to share one's voice or narrative external to the space of one's "immediate world" (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:109). Powell-Main's account is a powerful example of a confrontation of stigma, oppression and negative ideologies that inhibit the potential of individuals with difference.

Mattingly (2021:184) and others provide a platform to confront assumptions regarding ballet that remain both in pre-professional and professional settings. As argued by Jessica Zeller (in Mattingly 2021:184), an approach that respects "each dancer as an individual with a unique physical structure, intellectual capacity, and emotional range" is necessary in the teaching and observation of ballet. By including the perspectives of the dancers in my analyses, I intend, like Zeller (in Mattingly 2021:184), to demonstrate the transformation that such an approach holds for the experiences and opportunities for dancers, teachers and scholars.

3.3.2 Semiotic Analysis

In an article by Nataliya Kolesova (2019), a dancer with disability, it is claimed that "common perceptions of disability and dance" negatively affected and inhibited her assumed (im)possibility and (in)opportunity to engage in dance. Kolesova (2019:3) considers her return to dance as a moment of reform taking place in her life, a "crucial milestone" allowing her to accept and embrace her disability. Moreover, she believes that this provided her with the opportunity "to function as a worthy person" and gain "a sense of identity", claiming that her engagement in dance restored her self-confidence and self-respect (Kolesova 2019:3). A similar change in mind-set can be seen in my analysis of Powell-Main, who returned to dance in spite of prevalent negative perceptions of

disability, particularly disability *in* dance. I here consider a number of video clips shared on YouTube and on Facebook that show Powell-Main performing various dances in various settings. The first video features Powell-Main in a group dance of three – or a trio – performed at the Opening Ceremony of the One Young World Summit 2022. The second video captures the performance of Powell-Main with the Royal Ballet Company alongside the singer, Birdy, at Great Britain's Paralympic Homecoming event at the Wembley arena in London, 2021. The dance is accompanied by the song *"Nobody knows me like you do"*, which Birdy performed live at the event. The third and final video is a promotional clip of the production of *Sleepwalker*, directed by Alexander Campbell and choreographed by Kristen McNally[20], featuring dancers Powell-Main and Isabel Lubach. The music is by Sophie Cotton. The visual material I analyse in this section can be considered as recordings or documentations of rehearsals and performances. The visual material is therefore not the artwork/project in itself, but a representation thereof. Note that the findings of my analysis in this section rely on the consideration of both the dances that are represented in the video clips (this includes choreography, storyline, costumes) as well as the representation of these dances (this includes footage, angles).

In the *first* video, taken at the One Young World Summit's Opening Ceremony 2022, Powell-Main performs in a group dance of three (see Figure 16). Significant to the semiotic interpretation(s) that I draw from this film, I wish to point out that the dance was choreographed by Powell-Main himself. The dance opens in darkness, with only a few streams of light created by the spotlights above the stage. The dancers enter the stage one by one: a male and a female dancer, each carrying and dancing with a crutch, and Powell-Main in his wheelchair. A brief close-up reveals Powell-Main's costume and makeup which, identical to the other dancers' appearance, present a theme of black and white. All three dancers are dressed in tight-fitting vests with black and white stripes, and black pants. The stripes on the vests of the male and female dancers appear as optical illusions,

[20] Dancer and choreographer McNally is central to both the Paralympic Homecoming performance and the production of *Sleepwalker*. McNally shares her experience of working with Powell-Main in a promotional clip of the latter piece. She was one of the leading dancers who partnered with Powell-Main in the Paralympic Homecoming performance in 2021. As noted earlier, Powell-Main and McNally co-created this piece. When approached by Campbell to collaborate on the production of *Sleepwalker*, intended as a re-imagination of a "long lost" Ballet, an inspired McNally saw the perfect opportunity to choreograph the piece specifically for and with Powell-Main (Joseph Isaac Powell - Main 2023).

while Powell-Main's vest seems to have one of the black stripes resembling a lightning bolt. They all wear heavy makeup, which is typical for a dance performance of any kind on stage, due to the bright lighting and the fact that the audience is often seated quite far from the performers. The dancers perform what can be labelled a modern or neo-classical ballet. They dance to an emotive, instrumental arrangement that involves (presumably among other instruments) piano, violin and, later, a vocal choir and cymbals. Introducing the performance, a speaker uses the terms "strength" and "adversity" to describe the dance. The stage itself, however, is not decorated nor does it present a definite theme. The ambience is cold and dark at first, yet in some way also tranquil. As the dance and the music progress, the cold, blue hue on stage turns to a fiery red. At times the darkness creates an obscurity that renders the wheelchair almost invisible, making it appear as if Powell-Main turns and glides across the stage by himself (without the use of the wheelchair). At other times, the wheelchair is visible, often also appearing as a silhouette. This is because the camera seems to be within the space of the stage – sharing the same space, in other words, with the dancers. This is evident in the moments where the camera directly looks into the spotlight.

Powell-Main dances both in a wheelchair and with the aid of crutches, starting the dance in the wheelchair then transitioning to crutches at a later stage – he returns to his wheelchair near the end of the performance. Despite his dependence on a wheelchair or crutches, he performs the same motions as the other two dancers, and they appear as a *corps de ballet* (literally translating to body of ballet) or a group (trio). Although the other two dancers do not make use of the support of crutches (only used as a prop in certain moments, as evident in Figure 17) or a wheelchair, the movements of all three dancers correspond throughout the performance. The dancers are, for the most part, performing similar movements in synchronisation. The movement among the three dancers is seamless, the transitions are smooth and unhindered by anything – including the use of the crutches and/or wheelchair. Powell-Main, despite his disability, does not stand out as other in the performance, but appears the same as the other two dancers.

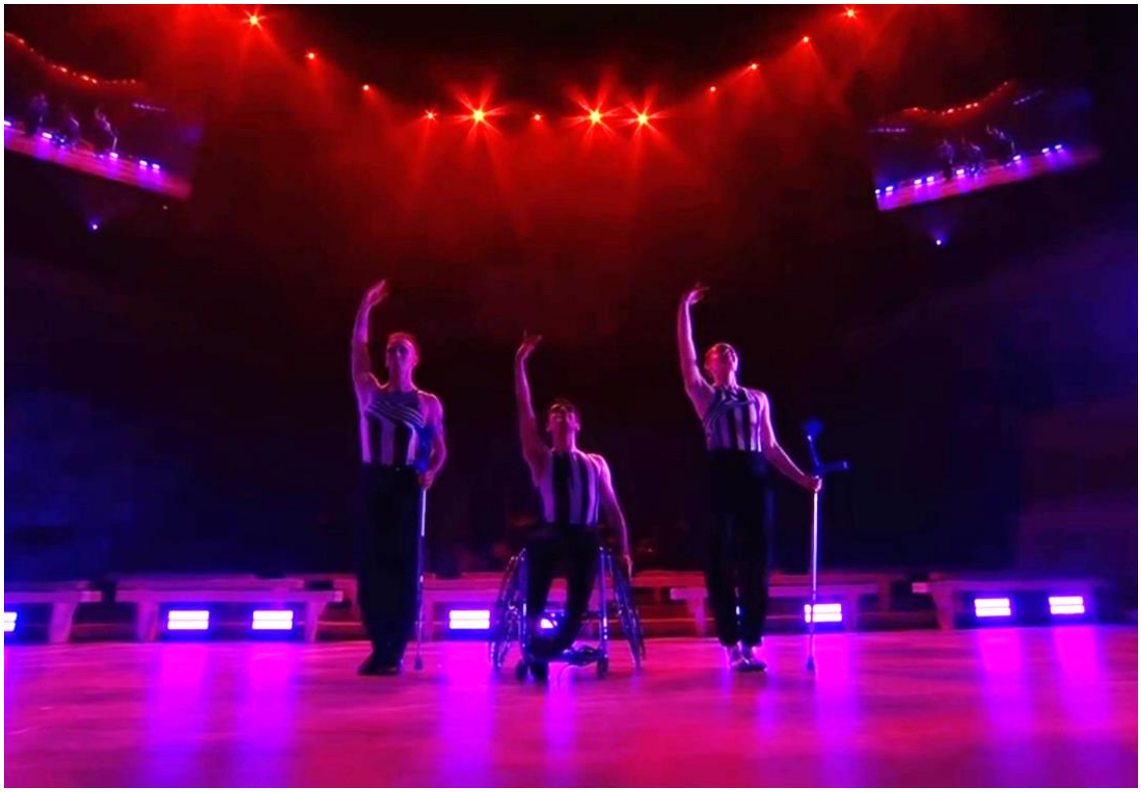

Figure 14: One Young World Summit Opening Ceremony Screenshot – Trio of Optical Illusions (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

The music, like the movement, builds to highpoints and then collapses. Both Powell-Main and the other male performer partner the female at certain moments during the dance, creating the look of a *pas de trois*. Note that the female dancer is wearing pointe shoes and executes various steps *en pointe* throughout the dance, representative of the genre of ballet. The conformity and similarity of the dancers' movements are reinforced when the able-bodied male and female dancers each utilise one of Powell-Main's crutches for brief moments in the dance, almost as if dancing with a prop. The male dancer can be seen doing this in the beginning of the dance, as he enters the stage carrying one of the crutches and in moments and movements such as in Figure 17. The female dancer performs with a crutch at a later stage while executing turns and a leap in the air. At the near end of the performance, Powell-Main returns to his wheelchair and he glides off stage with the other two dancers (running).

Figure 15: One Young World Summit Opening Ceremony Screenshot – Costumes & crutches (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

The ambience, colours and themes that emerge in this performance are central to a semiotic interpretation of the dance. The contrast between blue and red in this context may be symbolically compared to the elements of water and fire. Broadly speaking, water is often believed to symbolise power, cleansing and freedom (Shodiyevna 2022:70). The context of the water, however, determines its symbolic meaning. Powell-Main's costume, displaying what seems to be a lightning bolt, may be suggestive of water in the form of a rainstorm. While the blue hue may be related to power and freedom, the atmosphere is cold at first, and the music contributes to a more melancholic ambience. Water, in this sense, may represent feelings of hopelessness and sadness. These emotions find harmony with Powell-Main's initial experience as an aspiring dancer who suffered permanent injuries that were believed to be the end of his dream. Powell-Main admits in an interview, "when I acquired my disability I … thought that was it" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). He continues, stating, "I thought dance was completely done for me", and expressing that the thought of not being able to dance any longer was "a hard pill to swallow" (Joseph Isaac … 2023).

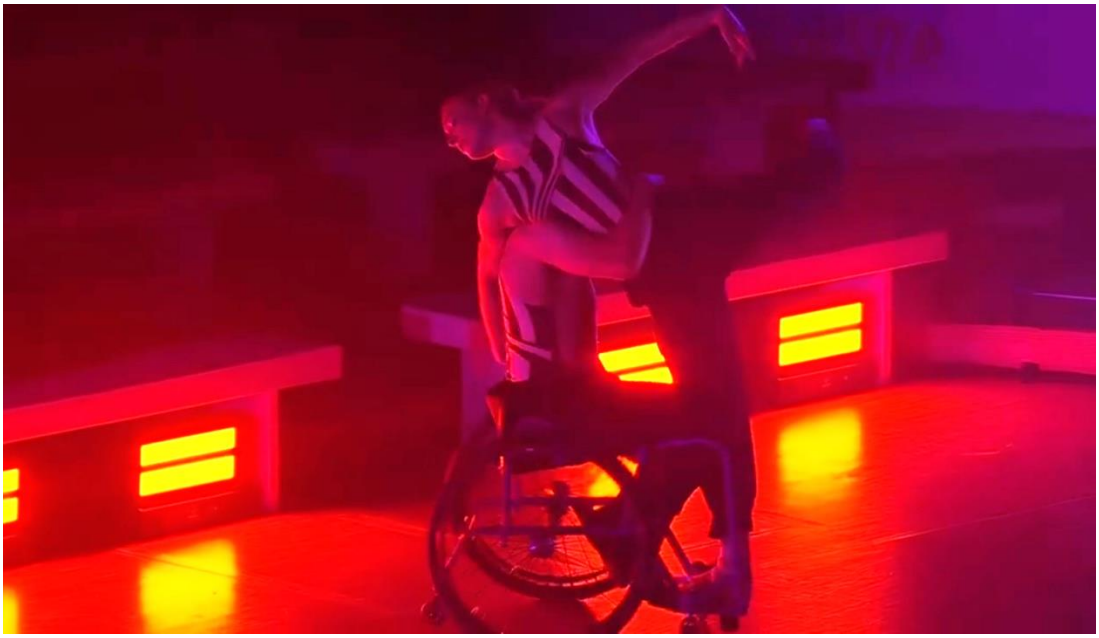

Figure 16: One Young World Summit Opening Ceremony Screenshot - Partnering nr.1 (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

As the dance progresses, the theme changes and flares up into a fiery red (see Figure 17). The music, continuously building up, also becomes more powerful and passionate. The symbolic meaning of fire is dependent on various contexts, in part due to its many functions. Subsequently, interpretations thereof may vary (Shodiyevna 2022:171). Nizomova Shoxista Shodiyevna (2022:171) proposes seven categorisations for the interpretation of fire, namely: passion and desire; rebirth and resurrection; eternity; destruction; hope; hell; purification. In analysing the performance(s) of Powell-Main, I find a number of these symbolic interpretations applicable. Symbolism of passion and desire stem from "the flicking of a flame" and the rapidness and recklessness with which a fire ignites and spreads (Shodiyevna 2022:171). The fiery red that surrounds the performance may also relate with the "fiery passion" found in Powell-Main's movement. The theme of rebirth and resurrection may be associated with Powell-Main's personal life story, speaking to his rebirth as a dancer. Shodiyevna (2022:171) comments on the fascinating capability of fire to simultaneously symbolise death *and* life, offering an example of this: "when a fire burns through a forest, the old growth in the forest burns away to allow space for the new forest to emerge from beneath". This overarching theme is highlighted in Powell-Main's own words, as he claims, from experience, that his "biggest setbacks" have become his "greatest strength" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Fire, says

Shodiyevna (2022:171), is capable of destroying anything it comes into contact with. Pertaining to this film, destruction as a symbolic interpretation of fire may be linked to the destruction of ableist myths that intend to keep individuals with disabilities, like Powell-Main, out of the studio and off the stage. According to Shodiyevna (2022:171), "[f]ire is something we look to … as a symbol that salvation is near". An example of hope as a symbol of fire can be seen in the fact that fire provides warmth when it is cold. Hope is arguably a large constituent of the performances by Powell-Main, in their active confrontation of ableism, by breaking down barriers to inclusion, and generation of an affirmative and empowering representation of dancer(s) with difference.

The presence of the wheelchair and crutches on stage also play an important role in this performance and the analysis thereof. While ideological notions of dance may expect certain physical assets, such as standing upright, this is not an obligatory component of dance (Kolesova 2019:5). These assets are rooted within dominant (mis)understandings and myths of dance, especially with regards to the male dancer, demanding physical qualities and capabilities, such as partnering the female dancer and having great strength in the lower body to do so. Powell-Main's capabilities do not correspond with these perceptions, yet they are palpable in the dance as he performs in harmony with the other dancers, executing movements that appear identical and that are synchronised with those of the other two dancers. Moreover, Powell-Main's role as the male dancer matches the other male dancer as they both smoothly support and partner the female dancer (see Figure 18). Kolesova (2019:5) relies on Karen A. Kaufmann's standpoint to argue that "wheelchair users are perfectly able to dance", providing an "understanding of … wrongful assumptions as rooted strictly in a social construct". Powell-Main's integration in the dance is seamless and the three dancers produce a similarity and uniformity that denies ableist myths of physical disability and an *othered* perspective of Powell-Main. The crutches also serve as a unifying element in the dance, as the other two dancers also utilise them during the execution of certain movements (Figure 17). The crutches are embedded in the choreography and serve a clear purpose on stage. Powell-Main therefore not only demonstrates his ability to dance, but also to partner the female dancer(s) despite his impairment. The performance addresses stigmas regarding wheelchairs and crutches and ableist myths that associate these objects with passivity, fragility and helplessness.

By refusing to accept this position and instead actively participating in the performance, Powell-Main is celebrated for his true identity and thus empowered.

Figure 17: Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony Screenshot - Powell-Main & wheelchair (Joseph Isaac ... 2022)

The two dancers that perform alongside Powell-Main are dressed in similar costumes, aside from the fact that his shirt displays a lightning bolt while theirs display black and white lines that appear as optical illusions (see Figure 16). These optical illusions may be considered as a mere stylistic addition to the performance. However, I believe that there lies greater significance in the symbolic meaning(s) behind this visual component. James Hoefler (2013:541) utilises the concept of optical illusions in order to illustrate the ease with which biased judgments are made with regards to any phenomenon that may in fact be viewed in more than one way. Supporting the intentions of this dissertation, his study demonstrates the validity of "multiple valid interpretations" of any given phenomenon (Hoefler 2013:541). Hoefler's (2013:544) approach opens up a willingness, ability and likelihood to "suspend … assumptions, mindsets, ideologies, and cultural frames of reference", by urging scholars to adopt numerous perspectives in order to "see clearly". The optical illusions seen on the bodies of the dancers can be seen as a direct expression of Hoefler's perspective-altering proposition, speaking to the detrimental ideologies and judgmental perceptions that surround disability in dance, as well as disability in general.

It may be read as a message that calls perspective into question. The fact that the two able-bodied dancers are displaying the optical illusions, while Powell-Main's costume is slightly different (displaying the lightning bolt), further encourages a different perspective not only of the performance itself, but also of the innate messages that are conveyed through it.

Figure 18: Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony Screenshot - Partnering nr.2 (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

The *second* video featuring Powell-Main is of the performance at the Paralympic Homecoming event at the Wembley arena in London, where Powell-Main danced alongside the Royal Ballet Company. The dance was carried out to live music by the singer, Birdy, who performed one of her original songs titled, "*Nobody knows me like you do*". The performance starts with Powell-Main sitting cross-legged on the right side of the stage, his back towards the audience, facing his wheelchair which is placed a few steps in front of him (see Figure 19). The backdrop displays an image of the sun beaming bright red through dark clouds. Pillars of red lights can be seen behind Birdy, sitting at the piano on the far left of the stage. Floating spotlights and fairy lights brighten the stage, resembling the appearance of stars. The ambience and theme on the stage is warm, vivid, almost heavenly. On the right hand side, where Powell-Main is sitting, theatrical gauze (also called scrim curtains) add to the adornment of the stage, reflecting the colours of the backdrop. As Birdy starts playing the introduction of the song on the piano, Powell-

Main's voice can be heard giving an account of his ballet journey. Powell-Main, and the other dancers that later join, wear clothing that appears to be casual, every day wear – loose-fitting t-shirts (men), cropped tops (women), pants and socks, in various pastel colours (see Figures 20 and 21). Although the style of their clothing is the same, the colours and clothing pieces do not match.

As Powell-Main's movements begin, so do the lyrics of the song. His movements start in the upper body while he remains seated on the stage floor, as seen in Figure 19. He then proceeds to move his entire body, first on the floor, then transferring himself to his wheelchair. A female dancer joins him, and soon the rest of the performers also enter the stage, all of them slowly approaching from various sides. As depicted in Figure 20, Powell-Main and the first female dancer perform a seamless section of *pas de deux* (literally translating to "step of two", where a male typically partners a female). In partnering the female dancer despite his impairment, Powell-Main contests ableist myths that position wheelchair users as weak and incapable. The rest of the dancers then join in.

Figure 19: Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony Screenshot – Image of the movement nr.1 (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

Two able-bodied male dancers and two able-bodied female dancers perform the remainder of the dance alongside Powell-Main. At first, all the dancers perform their own

individual movements, dancing independently, but collectively producing a rhythmic sway in the dance. As the dance continues, the dancers' movements become more identical and synchronised. Powell-Main transfers to his crutches after which the movements of the other dancers resemble his own. As Powell-Main's arms bend in supporting his weight on the crutches, so do the other dancers bend their arms as well. When Powell-Main leaps forward, once again supported by his crutches, a female dancer is picked up in the air by one of the other male dancers, in a similar leap. In another moment, Powell-Main and one of the female dancers both extend their legs in the air at the same angle. The movements are smooth and uninterrupted, with a gliding, swaying quality. The dancers often collapse and lean on one another, in the same way Powell-Main leans on his crutches. In the midst of the movement, the crutches almost appear as two legs, another body – or an extension of a body – that Powell-Main leans on. A sense of conformity is apparent throughout the dance, giving the appearance of a *corps de ballet*. Figures 21, 22 and 23 showcase these movements and qualities.The audience can be seen at times, showing sections filled with spectators sitting in wheelchairs – there are thus no seats in these spaces so as to allow space for the wheelchairs. The setting of the theatre or arena is thus indicative of an inclusive environment accepting and welcoming of people with physical impairment (see Figure 24).

Figure 20: Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony Screenshot – Image of the movement nr.2 (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

I wish to highlight the ways in which Powell-Main's performances inspire a change in the assumptions tied to the aesthetics of ballet by directly confronting them. One of the components of this constructed aesthetic of ballet is the image of the ballerina (in this case, also the *ballerino*, an Italian term referring to a professional male ballet dancer). While the stereotypical image of the ballerino is arguably not as strict and rigid as that of the ballerina, there remains a certain expectation that involves body type (long, lean muscles as opposed to a short bulky build) (Pickard 2013:13). As noted, the physical strength and capability of the male dancer is also emphasised in ableist myths and stereotypes of ballet. In addition, while being more flexible, there is a sense of a traditional dress code and clothing style for male dancers (stockings and fitted shirts, socks and ballet flats, a dance belt and neatly styled hair) that ranges from simplistic, for classes, to more flamboyant, for performances. The performance of Powell-Main and the Royal Ballet present non-traditional costumes that resemble casual everyday clothing in a variety of grey and pastel colours (see Figure 21). The performance thus challenges a stereotypical appearance of ballet performers. Moreover, the dancers' clothes do not match in colour, but only in style. There is a sense of uniformity, however, as in their movements, there is also a sense of distinctiveness.

In addition to the clothing, the dance style represents yet another challenge of tropes of ballet aesthetics. Line serves as another element worthy of inspection in this performance. Line, described by Fisher (2019:2), involves aspects such as pointing of the toes and precise placement of the body. Clark's (2018:86) view on line associates it with dominant perceptions of the body in ballet, functioning both as a feature of the body and as a product of the body's movement. The limitations, and at the same time the significance, of this idea – as pointed out in a previous section of this chapter – arise in its implication that the body exists beyond a "still body that complies with certain aesthetic criteria" (Clark 2018:86). In other words, the need to consider the body beyond its visible and tangible features, is revealed. Powell-Main's movement can also be interpreted as a confrontation of the ideologies that determine the aesthetic style of ballet. I have determined that Balanchine's choreographic style is an example of the defiance of traditional conventions. The "embrace of conflicting energies" and "angled arms" as features of such

choreography can be found in this performance (Fisher 2019:29). This style is evident in Figures 21, 22 and 23.

Kolesova (2019:5) points to the ways in which dominant beliefs and ableist myths deny the perception both of the "wheelchair as a natural extension of … [the] body" and of the wheelchair user as able "to perform movements sitting in a wheelchair". The crutches appear as a seamless extension of Powell-Main's body, perhaps even resembling another person at times as he leans forwards onto them in the same way the other dancers lean on one another. Similarly, the leaps performed by Powell-Main are followed by identical leaps by a female dancer who is lifted into the air by one of the male dancers. Powell-Main uses his crutches to lift himself into the air, while the female dancer uses the body of another dancer to do so. The crutches can therefore be said to symbolically represent a body with which Powell-Main dances. Moreover, the movements executed by Powell-Main, the other dancers imitating these movements, portray the breaking of the line as discussed above. Powell-Main's arms, clasping the handles of the crutches, create the appearance of "angled arms". The other dancers execute similar motions with their arms. By imitating the shapes that Powell-Main creates by dancing with crutches, the dance produces various poses that may not fit within traditionally recognised frames created by ballet movements. Yet, these movements and poses emerge as affective, artistic and aesthetically pleasing. The aesthetic ideologies that construct a normalised and idealised ballet body are challenged in this performance both by the dancers' clothing and their movements (Clark 2018:81). Importantly, Mattingly (2021:184) blames the "assumptions about ballet", as opposed to criticising the art form in itself, for producing harmful perspectives on ballet and its dancing bodies. Fisher (2019:23) shares this belief, arguing that ballet *itself* is incapable of determining its absorption and interpretation.

Figure 21: Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony Screenshot – Image of the movement nr.3 (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

The central lyrics of the song "nobody knows me like you do" communicate a tender, intimate relationship, presumably between two people. In Powell-Main's performance, the song may signify a different relationship, that considers an internal connection within an individual. Powell-Main's relationship with his own body and with ballet becomes an overarching theme in the performance, as it begins with his personal account of his experience as a young dancer who suffered injuries that left him disabled and devastated. The intimate connection between Powell-Main and ballet – once again I refer to the inner body-dance dimension – guided him back to dance after years of believing his dreams were forever destroyed. Once Powell-Main returned to dance, he rediscovered his love for ballet, the thing he knows, and the thing that knows him, like no one else.

It is by now certain that performance can function as a means of eliminating myths, stereotypes and assumptions that associate disability with negative qualities, by providing the opportunity to present the "uniquely beautiful capabilities" of individuals with disabilities rather than reducing them to their difference (Campbell 2009:29). Delgado and Humm-Delgado (2017:111-112) point to various benefits that accompany participation in dance (as a performing art) which, importantly, are unique to each individual. Among these benefits, those most relevant to my analysis of the videos

featuring Powell-Main include shared enjoyment, communicating his "experiences, ideas and emotions", artistic self-expression, utilising personal strengths that are generally overlooked, and "being a role model for younger youth with disabilities" (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:111-112).

Powell-Main's performances serve as an illustration of his intention as a role model both for able-bodied and disabled persons (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:112). Powell-Main's poetic verbal introduction to the dance ends by clearly communicating the message and meaning behind the performance: "This is my message: never give up and never stop dreaming" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Powell-Main's message, intended to inspire acceptance, acknowledgement and appreciation of marginalised bodies in ballet, is epitomised through his representation of disability on stage, not as *other*, but as equal and empowered. The overall theme of the event, celebrating the homecoming of Great Britain's Paralympic athletes, reinforces this powerful representation and Powell-Main's message as an advocate for change and inclusivity. The view of the audience members seated in their wheelchairs, as opposed to the typical setting of an audience – rows of red seats divided into columns by sloping aisles of stairs – further exemplifies the inclusion and embrace of disability, breaking down the ideological dichotomy of self and other (see Figure 24). This collapse of boundary between self and other not only occurs between the audience and the dancers, but also between disabled and non-disabled audience members.

Figure 22: Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony Screenshot – Audience of wheelchair users (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

Associating with the multidimensionality of dance, Clark's (2018:77) study has positioned ballet as a practice that provides enjoyment and self-expression. As noted, in an interview with Powell-Main regarding this performance, he describes the event as the "best experience I've ever had" (ITV News 2021). Powell-Main discloses his relationship with ballet – relating to the inner body-dance dimension, also as noted, by expressing that he pours his "heart and soul into dance" (ITV News 2021). This performance thus clearly showcases the multidimensionality of body and ballet and evidently challenges the traditions of which Fisher (2019:9) desires renewal and revision, opening a path towards the restoration of both ballet and body.

In the *third* video of Powell-Main, he introduces viewers to *Sleepwalker*, a piece co-created by Kristen McNally (choreographer) and Alexander Campbell (director). The video serves the purpose of a trailer or promotion of this production which is, according to Campbell, "a re-imagination of *La Somnambule*, The Sleepwalker" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). In the video, Powell-Main explains that the piece tells the story of a woman who experiences sleepwalking. Powell-Main performs the role of "the physical embodiment of everything [the woman] experiences" while she is sleepwalking. Campbell describes Powell-Main's movement quality in the dance as a "gliding, paranormal movement" and states that McNally's choreography showcases Powell-Main's "spirit-like ability to … glide across the space" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). According to Powell-Main, the movement affords him feelings of strength and power and he believes that his personality can be seen in his dancing (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Brief moments of the dance are shown in the video. The movements between Powell-Main and his female dance partner, Isabel Lubach, show their bodies intertwining, almost becoming one. At times, Powell-Main's movements are smooth, circular and sensual. At other times, they become more swift and rigid (compare Figures 25 and 26). This is said to represent the contrast between dreams (producing a supportive and gentle character) and nightmares (producing a more malicious character), as Powell-Main embodies Lubach's mind. Campbell insists that Powell-Main's movement "only [makes] the whole thing better" (Joseph Isaac … 2023).

Figure 23: Sleepwalker Screenshot - Smooth Movement (Joseph Isaac ... 2023)

Figure 24: Sleepwalker Screenshot - Rigid movement (Joseph Isaac ... 2023)

Adding to the theme of multidimensionality, Fisher (2019:10) points to the capabilities of ballet beyond physicality and sensoriality. Dance is proven to be linked to the third dimension of the body, described as the landscape of an individual's soul. Eiss (2013:72) refers to Graham, who also comments on this meta-physical capability, as previously discussed, by explaining dance as "the expression of man". Also cognisant of the multidimensionality of dance, Mircea Neamţu and Danna Pîrvulescu (2015:129) claim

that dance "can express complex human thought and feeling through the body … in many genres and many cultures". Relating to the multidimensionality of body and ballet, Powell-Main declares that performance allows him to "feel alive" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Neamţu and Pîrvulescu (2015:129) describe dance as a means of unspoken, natural communication both between an individual and his/her body, as well as between the dancer's body and the spectator's body. Such communication is said to be both conscious and subconscious, taking place in a "secure situation", and resulting from "the rhythm of music" (Neamţu & Pîrvulescu 2015:129). The story portrayed in the dance facilitates such communication – at times, the movement is slow, smooth and gentle, symbolising a dream, while at other times the movement is rapid, sudden and intimidating, symbolising a nightmare. The music, although apparently accompanying the video and not the performance itself, aligns with these changes of mood and atmosphere.

Following the approach of other academics referred to in this dissertation, Neamţu and Pîrvulescu (2015:130) claim that dance is a vehicle for the expression of "irreducible aspects of [an individual's] personality". Importantly, this performance is said to afford Powell-Main the opportunity to express his personality (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Furthermore, Neamţu and Pîrvulescu (2015:129) argue that dance allows for the expression of "the inner state of the dancer", implying that his/her mood determines "the message of the dance". Powell-Main describes himself, off stage, as withdrawn and "guarded", while claiming that, on stage, his "guard … completely drops" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). This statement demonstrates the ability of performing on stage to provide an opportunity for self-expression and loss of self-consciousness, as argued by Kleiner (2009:236-244). This space is shown, by his own testimony, to offer Powell-Main the sensation of losing self-consciousness and allowing him to express himself artistically (Kleiner 2009:250). Further noting the power of performance, Powell-Main claims that "the movement within the piece makes [him] feel quite strong and powerful" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Powell-Main's words are, importantly, an indication of the ways in which dance reaches the body's third dimension and is capable of connecting with this dimension This statement also explicitly points to the empowering experience that Powell-Main is afforded through ballet.

Figure 25: Sleepwalker Screenshot – Ability nr.1 (Joseph Isaac … 2023)

Terms such as "updated" and "reimagined" are used by the creators and dancers of *Sleepwalker* to describe the dance and its intentions, pointing, among many things, to its change in perspective(s) (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Indeed, the original production of *La Somnambule* (The Sleepwalker), based on the opera *La Somnambula* by Vincenzo Bellini, did not include a professional wheelchair dancer. David Toole (one of the most well-known dancers with disability, a double amputee, who passed away in 2020) claimed, with regards to his own performance(s), that his disabled body was capable of dancing "in a way that the non-disable can admire but not replicate" (Campbell 2009:29). Toole's performances demonstrated the ways in which sympathy is powerfully replaced by appreciation, even envy, within audiences (Campbell 2009:29). Powell-Main's representation in *Sleepwalker* does not yield feelings of pity or sympathy. Campbell's description of Powell-Main's dancing demonstrates this unique *ability* – rather than *disability* – of Powell-Main to execute movements that able-bodied dancers cannot execute or reproduce. His movements are described as "paranormal", "spirit-like" and "gliding" qualities (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Reinforcing the appreciation, and possible envy, provoked by such movement, Campbell declares that Powell-Main's movement adds to and enhances the effect of the performance (Joseph Isaac … 2023). These

expressions imply that the dance could not have been produced with the same effect and success without Powell-Main and his unique abilities.

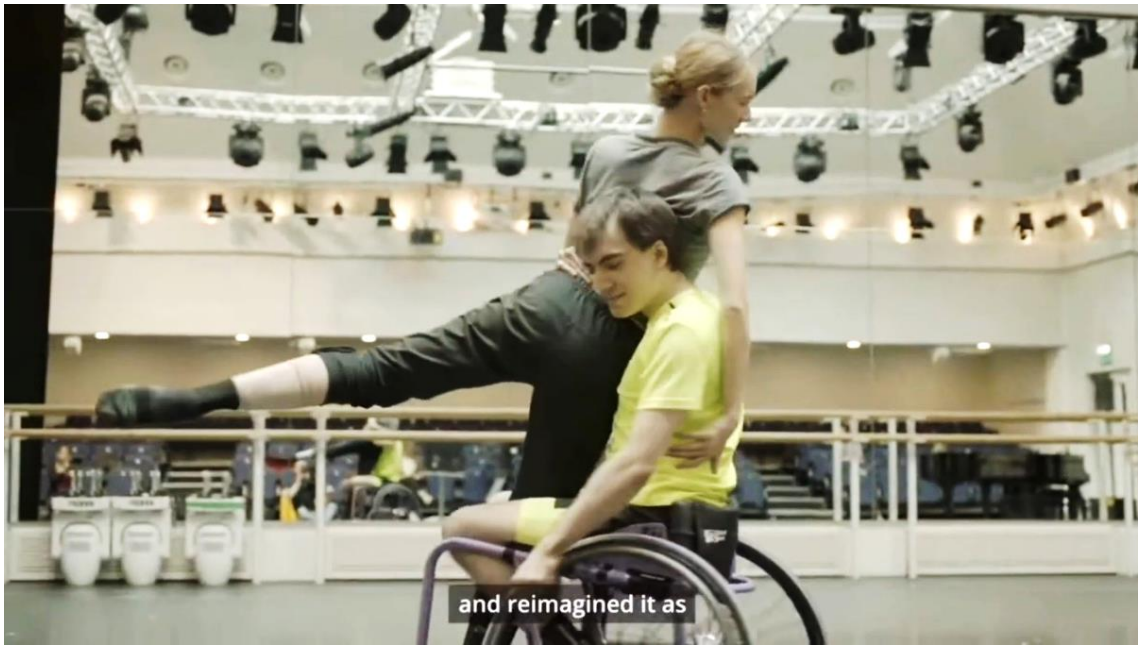

Figure 26: Sleepwalker Screenshot – Ability nr.2 (Joseph Isaac … 2023)

Another aspect of the dance that favourably positions Powell-Main as an active, able character, is the fact that his dancing symbolises the embodiment of Lubach's mind – in other words, he represents the physical aspects of the third dimension (represented by Lubach), despite his disability and perceived bodily difference. This places again an emphasis on his *ability* as opposed to his *disability*, creating, and placing him within, an empowering position. Powell-Main's partnering of the female dancer, shown in Figures 27 and 28, is a literal and physical display of this ability and counters myths that relegate and deem persons with disabilities as weak, powerless and dependent.

The self-other dichotomy can be said to collapse in the three videos of Powell-Main's performances. This occurs from the perspective of the viewer, created by the angle of the camera, that frequently captures movements and moments from the space of the stage. This positions the spectator in the same space as the dancer, thus breaking down any contrast between self and other. The spectator is at the same time immersed within the dance, as opposed to observing the dance from outside or from a different space. This can be seen in the fact that the spotlights, which are directed at the dancers on the stage,

directly face the camera. The videos taken, both of the performance at the One Young World Summit (Figure 29) and the performance at the Paralympic Homecoming event (Figure 30), reveal this perspective.

Figure 27: One Young World Summit Opening Ceremony Screenshot – In the space of the stage nr.1 (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

Figure 28: Paralympic Homecoming Ceremony Screenshot – In the space of the stage nr.2 (Joseph Isaac … 2022)

Following Clark's (2018:78) suggestion, this dissertation is concerned with *what* the body does, *how* it moves, and its *experiences*. This objective openly speaks to the multidimensionality of body and ballet, and allows for numerous understandings and interpretations of the ballet body that extend beyond the visual (Clark 2018:78). Powell-Main's performances represent self-expression, both through verbal accounts – the interview in the *Sleepwalker* video and the poetic introduction to the performance with the Royal Ballet in the second video – and through his movements that illustrate the experience(s) of embodying and expressing one's true self. Approaching these videos from a multidimensional perspective opens up the opportunity to view the performances for the messages they intend to convey, as opposed to analysing the "decorative appearance" of the dance and dancers. This allows for a release from the discriminatory and stigmatising beliefs that produce negative perspectives, myths and stereotypes on ballet and body (Fisher 2019:35).

The expression found in dance is "controlled, deliberate, and appropriate to its type and spirit" (Neamţu & Pîrvulescu 2015:129). With this in mind, Neamţu and Pîrvulescu (2015:129) refer to an "organic bond" that forms within a performance between the physical expression of the dancer and the audience's imaginative, emotional interpretation of this expression. This occurrence directly reflects the process of signification that takes place through the communication of thoughts and feelings by way of "facial expression, gestures [and] posture", among other aspects (Neamţu & Pîrvulescu 2015:129).

Integrated companies, inclusive of able-bodied and disabled dancers, have aided the process of changing negative perceptions of people with disabilities in the performing arts. Yet, a recurring criticism accuses such organisations of incompletely breaking down the traditional dis/ability dichotomy in the interpretation(s) of performances (Campbell 2009:27). It is often argued that this contrast between able bodies and disabled bodies is made apparent through "conspicuous pairing of disabled dancers with non-disabled dancers" or through presenting a wheelchair on stage without determining "its meaning or contribution to the performance as a whole" (Campbell 2009:27). In turn, this process reinforces ableist myths that depict persons with physical disabilities as fragile, weak and

helpless. Campbell (2009:27) argues that the "misuse of disabled performers on stage" results in a sympathetic framing of performers with disabilities as pitiable. Campbell (2009:28), however, takes Albright's performances – which I align with Powell-Main's performances – as an example of how such representation can be eluded and overcome, through deliberately exposing one's difference and contradicting traditional portrayals of the dancing body. This intentional, self-controlled display of difference contradicts and confronts 1) common tendencies to undermine performers with disabilities by subjecting them "to a non-disabled style" and 2) "non-disabled-centric conceptions of grace and control" (Campbell 2009:28). Albright presents her disability as "an unexplored possibility". Campbell (2009:28) states that: "while a dance performance is grounded in the physical capacities of a dancer, it is not limited by them". She subsequently argues that the typical power dynamics can be reversed through the performance of dance. She points to the experiences of dancers with disabilities, who claim that they feel empowered within the space of the stage – a platform that allows them, as with able-bodied dancers, to manipulate instead of merely being subjected to a criticising gaze (Campbell 2009:28). Noting once again the power of dance and its intimate connection to the body's third dimension, Powell-Main believes that his performances create "a platform to … inspire others" (Joseph Isaac … 2023). Powell-Main gains empowerment by this position, from which he is capable of exposing himself as a credible artist with agency. This process may occur, says Campbell (2009:29), "with or without mention of [one's] disability". The performances seen in the three videos thus each serve as a confrontation of the forceful stigmatising and discriminating myths and stereotypes of disability, producing and representing the artist before the disability – as opposed to the other way around (Campbell 2009:29).

Kolesova's (2019:8) paper explains how dancing can function as "a challenging and fulfilling activity for" individuals with disabilities who are constantly faced with "aesthetic, attitudinal, training-related, logistic [and] access" barriers. According to Neamţu and Pîrvulescu (2015:135), dance is "the supreme combination … of [m]ind, [c]ommunication and [b]ody". This statement addresses the multidimensionality of body and ballet, in connecting the mind, the physical body and dance.

Campbell (2009:29) believes that the dancer with disability (difference) is capable of reconfiguring the dominant ideological understandings of ballet and the traditional aesthetic beliefs that are associated with it. However, this process is one of immense depth and complexity. Subsequently, in the Royal Opera House (2021) panel discussion, Powell-Main argues that "principles must be put in place and efforts to bring about change must be made. In this same discussion, Powell-Main points to the ways in which ableism obstructs perspectives by producing physical barriers, of which he believes negative attitudes towards people with disabilities shape the most significant of these barriers (Royal Opera … 2021). It is necessary, he says, to accept the existence of these barriers, in order to change them and subsequently break them down (Royal Opera … 2021). Powell-Main describes people's experiences as unique and valid, stressing the importance of understanding the breadth of the spectrum of these individuals' needs in eradicating ableism. The experiences of each of these individuals must be approached with empathy and understanding (Royal Opera … 2021). This analysis intended to demonstrate such an approach to the three videos featuring Powell-Main, by employing a multidimensional perspective on the body and on the art of ballet.

3.4 Conclusion

The negative ideological impacts on persons with disabilities and disfigurement are clear. These impacts may prove so severe that they may result in the abjection of such persons, denying them any voice, identity and sense of belonging. A hermeneutic analysis of DePrince sought to consider her as 1) an individual with disfigurement and 2) a dancer, through a multidimensional framework, with the purpose of proposing an opportunity for restoring both ballet and disfigurement, by providing a multidimensional perspective on both these subjects. A semiotic analysis of DePrince intended to counter mythologies of the ballerina, beauty and femininity, as well as stereotypical ideas surrounding ballet and disfigurement. Similarly, a hermeneutic analysis of Powell-Main sought after a multidimensional perspective on body and ballet, in an attempt to position as obstacle not ballet, but instead social perceptions & ideologies. This determines ballet and body as two subjects in need of restoration, the one (ballet) being capable of facilitating the restoration of the other (body). Semiotic investigation of Powell-Main proved valuable in breaking down stigmas and myths of physical disability, the male dancer and

performances of ballet. This chapter has shown that, through a critical multidimensional consideration of ballet, disfigurement and physical disability, these subjects can be released from dominant ideologies, which result in harmful misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DANCE

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shift the focus of examination to the *dance* (ballet), introducing an organisation known as Freefall Dance Company. I now analyse from a multidimensional perspective the founding of the just mentioned company and its positive impact in society, opening up a space for inclusion and restoration of all bodies in ballet.

The Wales-based company, Ballet Cymru is dedicated to include and innovate in the world of dance – and ballet, in particular. According to the company's website, one of Ballet Cymru's main goals is to break down barriers that prevent access to the arts (Ballet Cymru [sa]). The Royal Ballet also proves its openness to and representation of diversity in its proud collaboration with wheelchair dancer, Powell-Main. I have mentioned companies founded in earlier decades that stand for inclusion and integration, including Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels (1980) and CandoCo Dance Company (1991), set out to challenge and change "the socially constructed image of disabled performers" (Campbell 2009:27). Imogen Aujla (2021:483) also points to such existing inclusive institutions in the United Kingdom that aim to break down barriers to dance for persons with disabilities and to close the gap between the recreational and professional space of dance. Among these examples are Stopgap Dance Company, as well as professional dancers with disabilities, such as David Toole and Caroline Bowditch (Mead 2017:164). However, Aujla (2021:482-483) argues that dancers with disabilities are predominantly associated with dance that takes place recreationally and communally. This is because the nature of these spaces is specifically constructed to include dancers with difference who are otherwise excluded (Aujla 2021:482-483). On the other hand, professional and performance-oriented ballet institutions with the same values are scarce. Although these recreational and communal establishments are not to be undervalued in their positive intentions and potentials, Aujla (2021:483) believes that negative and discouraging experiences may result for those who wish to progress and develop further in dance. It is necessary to remind oneself that, in acknowledging multidimensionality, the perpetrator here is not the art of ballet, but the social, political and cultural structure of a given institution that engages in this art form. This also creates the impression that dancers with

disability (or disfigurement) are "less worthy of [performing] publically" (Mead 2017:165).

As explained by Couser (2005:602), disability can affect one's senses, mobility, form and/or function, it can be "static or progressive, congenital or acquired … visible or invisible". Acknowledging the difference(s) between those impairments that affect physical functioning and those that affect intellectual functioning is essential. It has been determined that impairments may affect one's ability to see, move, think, remember, learn, communicate or hear, or affect his/her mental health and/or social relationships (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [sa]). Importantly, not all disabilities are conspicuous (Centers for … [sa]). Dominant understandings and representations of cognitive disability have been introduced and considered. These understandings and representations relate cognitive disability and visible difference with themes such as weakness and illness. By misrepresenting individuals with cognitive disability, they become visible, deviant, and a distinct subdivision of society (Jackson 1995:321). The stigmatisation and discrimination of these individuals are apparent, positioning and interpreting them as nonconforming (Jackson 1995:334). Subsequently, people with cognitive disabilities are constantly under the surveillance, management and control of biased social systems. Dominant ideological understandings and stereotypical perceptions of cognitive disability label such individuals as pitiable, lesser and unknowable (Fudge Schormans 2011:303). As noted, by ignorantly criticising people with cognitive disabilities for being "the root cause of [social] problems" and for subsequently transmitting their "neuropathic inheritance and … social ineptitude to future generations", these people have traditionally been seen as a significant threat against social order (Jackson 1995:323). Other misrepresentations or myths label them as victims and/or dangerous beings that ought to be distanced from those who are *normal* (Harter *et al* 2006:6).

4.2 Freefall Dance Company

4.2.1 Hermeneutic Analysis

One company that stands out above the mentioned organisations, with the same yet more powerful transformative goals, is Freefall Dance Company, catering specifically for

individuals with cognitive disabilities. According to the definitions provided earlier, both cognitive and physical disabilities fall into the category of "*disability*" and classify those who are associated with any such impairments as a person with disability and difference, a person marginalised, stigmatised and negatively affected by dominant ideologies – even more so in the arts (specifically dance) than in general social life.

4.2.1.1 Freefall Dance Company – Who Are They?

A 2007 article by Lee Fisher, published by *People Dancing*, introduces and describes his perspective on dance. Fisher performed as an artist and member of the Birmingham Royal Ballet for nearly two decades and currently holds the title "Head of Creative Learning" in the company. Fisher (2007) refers to the company as a space that offers a "shared sense of belonging" among its members. There is "a collective drive to" self-express, says Fisher (2007). An important recollection of his time as an artist with the Birmingham Royal Ballet, Fisher (2007) comments on the constant affirmation spread among the members, creating a community. Freefall Dance Company was established in 2002. This company can be considered an innovation that is founded through collaboration with professional ballet company, Birmingham Royal Ballet, and an arts college, Fox Hollies Performing Arts College (abbreviated as Fox Hollies), that caters for individuals between the ages of eleven and nineteen with special needs (Mead 2017:164). The company was established based on these organisations' shared interest in extending their practice, as well as their recognition of, and desire to include, individuals who were otherwise unable to access these "quality dance opportunities" (Fisher 2007). The initial motivation behind this collaboration did not intend to establish a new company. However, "the possibilities providing a training and performing platform for some of the school's highly gifted young people" were soon realised (Mead 2017:164). Subsequently, Freefall Dance Company was founded, forming an influential part in performance as well as workshops, conferences and teacher education (Mead 2017:164).

According to Keith Youngson (in Mead 2017:166), deputy head at Fox Hollies, the Fox Hollies students – who, following its establishment, formed part of Freefall Dance Company – firmly disregarded boundaries, allowing for an integrated and intersectional space for creativity and performance. Fisher, together with Youngson, intended to create

a network consisting of their respective areas of expertise "in a scaled-down" performance space inclusive of dance and special education, subsequently modelling the company "on a professional ensemble" (Mead 2017:166). The company's philosophy is built on Fox Hollies' disability awareness model, enabling the dancers to engage with several primary schools, educators and students, relying throughout on their knowledge of ballet (Fisher 2007).

The company is made up of staff from Birmingham Royal Ballet, freelance dancers, instructors and assistants, and (currently) "ten highly gifted dancers with severe learning disabilities" (Birmingham Royal Ballet [sa]). These individuals are, according to Jan McNulty (2013), "invited to join in recognition of their talent, creativity and enthusiasm for dance". In a critical reflection on these terms, Aujla together with Emma Redding (2014:55) reveal the lack of research on the means of identifying and developing talent "among young dancers with disabilities". Consequently, they question this means, asking: "How do we identify talented young dancers with disabilities?" (Aujla & Redding 2014:55). According to their 2014 study, physical elements have been shown to be trainable and improvable, suggesting that talent is not essentially built on inborn or fixed qualities. On the other hand, there are many factors, some fluid and fluctuating according to the dancer and his/her training space, that influence talent (Aujla & Redding 2014:55). Such elements that proved more significant according to the study, included "movement quality, creative potential, passion and enthusiasm" (Aujla & Redding 2014:59). Another significant element which they discussed was embodiment – inhabiting one's "own unique body" is considered more important than the ability to execute specific technical skills (Aujla & Redding 2014:60).

The Freefall members have weekly two-hour sessions in the studios of the Birmingham Royal Ballet, focusing equally on "formal ballet technique training and choreographic work" (Birmingham Royal … [sa]). In addition to these weekly sessions, the dancers also engage in intensive programmes that take place during the holidays. Fisher (in Mead 2017:66) describes Freefall Dance Company as "a performance company" set out to produce the highest quality performances possible for audiences that value them purely as performances, as opposed to *disabled* performances. Fisher continues, expressing his

desire for audiences to enjoy these performances just like any other. Aujla and Redding (2014:65) reveal that organisations such as Freefall Dance Company set high expectations for dance students, despite their disabilities. Purposeful training typically involves the implementation of these high standards and instructors continuously challenging students (Aujla & Redding 2014:65). Aujla and Redding (2014:65) assert that high expectations mean optimal development of talents and increased confidence within the space of training. Furthermore, setting these standards serve to instil ballet etiquette and hard work among students (Aujla & Redding 2014:65). The outcome, according to Fisher (in Mead 2017:166), equals success and a shift in perceptions of ballet and disability (bodily difference).

Mead (2017:166) acknowledges the progress and change that has been taking place in viewing dance as open to all, while disclosing the impact of remaining assumptions that associate the performance of dance (specifically ballet) with certain bodies that are considered "aesthetically pleasing" on stage. This causes a barrier that obstructs the participation of individuals who do not conform to such standards – on the very end of this spectrum lies the disabled and/or disfigured body. Among many successful undertakings, Freefall Dance Company celebrates an annual showcase and has shot and published several films featuring their dancers in remarkable performances (Birmingham Royal … [sa]). Fisher (2007) claims that the company, emerging from a "long-term partnership", merely scratches the surface of (Youngson) Fox Hollies and (Fisher) Birmingham Royal Ballet's "mutually beneficial ongoing relationship".

4.2.1.2 A Creative Space to Embrace Difference & Self-Express

Bringing to mind Kleiner's central arguments, Jemma Bicknell (in Mead 2017:165) comments on the power of performance to challenge customary perceptions of difference. She argues that performance is capable of transforming perceptions and, by doing so, shifts dancers with difference from a place of passivity and suppression to one of activity, agency and expression (Mead 2017:165). In addition, by allowing these dancers to aspire to perform, they are given the opportunity to implement and experience creativity, and share in meaningful artistic endeavours (Mead 2017:165). The anticipation and thrill experienced by dancers before stepping on stage, followed by excitement, occurs due to

the fact that performance is not typically related to intentions of improving and self-reflecting. Echoing the multidimensionality of dance, Kleiner's (2009:253) study demonstrated overwhelmingly positive experiences and even altered states of consciousness within dancers as they stepped on stage. Performance is meant solely for dance and self-expression, free from any technical concerns or self-scrutiny (Kleiner 2009:254). Kleiner (2009:253) relates the dancer to the surfer in explaining an ideal experience of performance:

> Just as a surfer has uncertainty of himself or herself and has to feel out what to do, physically, before the wave comes, a dancer self-consciously adjusts his or her movements in anticipation of the performance. But during a performance, the dancer— like the surfer—just "rides." It is not that an oncoming wave results in surfing, or that stepping onto a stage produces unself-consciousness, but that experience and intentional preparation allow for the possibility of riding that wave.

Corresponding also with Kleiner's theories, Imogen Aujla and Emma Redding (in Mead 2017:165) note the palpable difference between a recreational space for dance and a performance space for dance. As discussed in previous chapters, Kleiner separates the space of the studio from the space of the stage, claiming that while one's difference may be clearly visible within the former space, the latter allows a release from the awareness of difference. It is perhaps necessary to point out that the studio-stage dichotomy is not a synonym for the amateur-professional dichotomy – the latter is not bound to or determined by the former, nor the other way around. Freefall Dance Company functions both within the space of the studio and the stage, providing empowering opportunities and experiences for its dancers in both these spaces. It is also important to recognise that, although the space of the stage releases one from visibility and self-scrutiny, the space of the studio *can* be a constructive environment. While Kleiner reveals a separation between studio and stage in demonstrating the power of performance, the studio is nevertheless an adaptable space that can be considered in many contexts. Aujla (2021:496) sees the studio as a potential space in which to advance ambitious dancers with disabilities. This proves highly valuable due to the benefits that lie within the technical aspects of ballet, such as increased "confidence, teamwork and independence" (Aujla 2021:496). Freefall Dance Company's studio space is a supportive, safe environment with "a light-hearted by focused atmosphere", where dancers are driven "to improve their classical dance skills" (Birmingham Royal … [sa]). Recognising the potential benefits grounded in the studio

space, Fisher (2007) claims that the shared language of ballet contributes to dancers' individual and collective identities, their experienced security and safety in the studio, and constructive self-reflection. According to Fisher (2007), it is precisely the "rituals and structure" of ballet that offer dancers "an authentic base from which to create, perform and appreciate dance". Thus, under specific circumstances, the studio space may offer the dancer the same bodily control and autonomy that is achieved on stage. Note again that these observations regard ballet in its essence, as opposed to the predominant ideological structures through which it is often considered. Freefall Dance Company is a fine example of such a platform – an authentic space that grants the freedom for creation, performance and appreciation of ballet (Fisher 2007). Along with the growing awareness and understanding of these benefits, it is possible to expand and enhance the opportunities for dancers with difference in the world of ballet (Aujla 2021:496).

While, on two ends of the spectrum, dance has become accessible for recreational purposes and also in an integrated professional setting, there remains a gap between these two ends. This gap is primarily training-oriented (Aujla & Redding 2014:54). Aujla and Redding propose an inclusive network that inspires and embraces disabled youth in dance, regarding all schools, groups and integrated companies. Mead (2017:165) expands on this suggestion by introducing progressive exploration:

> Why stop at integrated companies, and why stop at contemporary dance, where almost all work with dancers with a disability resides? What could be achieved if classical ballet, with all its associations with aesthetics purity, was put at the heart of work for such dancers?

Mattingly (2021), as discussed, is concerned with the perspective and experience of the dancer. In an article dedicated to "multifaceted perspectives on ballet", she examines an anthology titled *(Re:)Claiming Ballet*, dealing extensively with the themes of dismantling persisting problematics in the ballet world (Mattingly 2021:182). Zeller (in Mattingly 2021:184), also previously mentioned, includes the perspective of the student and takes into account his/her "unique physical structure, intellectual capacity, and emotional range". While a primary goal has been determined to be the "healing of the ballet community" rather than "a critique of the ballet establishment", Mattingly (2021:185) believes that the former is possible only by addressing the negative ideological structures

of the latter. The dynamics and purpose of Freefall Dance Company illustrate a powerful initiation of this process.

Aujla and Redding (2014:56) discuss two central themes in the development of dancers such as those of Freefall Dance Company. Firstly, "effective communication" is essential within the space of training. Dance instructors must know and understand their students on a physical and psychological level. Secondly, "a supportive environment" must be constructed in which to implement training (Aujla & Redding 2014:56). Dance instructors must create and maintain a safe, secure and supportive space. Such a space enables mutual respect, offers dancers autonomy and encourages them to take risks. Freefall Dance Company's studio space embraces these values, by "giving learners some responsibilities and decision-making roles" (Aujla & Redding 2014:57). Examples of this include the way(s) in which the company embraces the ideas and suggestions of its dancers, offers them authority and agency, and subsequently breaks down traditional hierarchies and rigid institutional functioning. Closing down the divide between the professional and scholastic/educational space of dance, Anne Gallacher introduced workshops and other ventures in Birmingham Royal Ballet (involving numerous schools and groups with diverse backgrounds), through which the learners have an opportunity to work as facilitators (Mead 2017:165). Providing accessible routes to dance for persons with disabilities will prove only beneficial, enriching the ballet world with these dancers' "talents, creativity and passion" (Aujla 2021:496).

Fisher (in Mead 2017:167) taps into the dancers' creativity and, equally important, he embraces their ideas and experiences. Dancers are free to experiment and contribute to the projects. The company inspires its members to express themselves and their individuality through movement. Each dancer and his/her personal expression are welcomed in the production of works that are later performed (Birmingham Royal … [sa]). Bearing in mind the company's purpose in striving "for excellence" and "attention to detail", Fisher (in Mead 2017:167) also aims to "empower the dances to make the work their own", creating dance that is "honest and authentic". Freefall Dance Company views itself as epitomising "collaborative and distributive leadership", which guarantees "genuine ownership … of all … choreography" (Birmingham Royal … [sa]). Carrie

Sandahl and Philip Auslander (2005:4) argue that this type of approach has initiated a recent rejection of ideologically traced frameworks. Instead, performers such as those in Freefall Dance Company, create work rooted in their personal experiences. In turn, their performances confront clichéd narratives and discriminatory aesthetic beliefs. Stereotypical representations of disability – associated with terms such as "freak", "cripple", "helpless", "pitiable" and "charitable" – are challenged and socio-cultural understandings of the body have been remodelled through the performances of groups like Freefall Dance Company (Cheu 2005:135). Moreover, the dancers operate as active artists, resulting in the representation of each of their personalities, ideas and creativity in the company's work (Birmingham Royal … [sa]). Returning to the space of the studio – in particular the restorative capacity that can be detected within the space of Freefall Dance Company's studio(s) – this experience is, according to Fisher (2007), grounded in the rituals of ballet practice.

4.2.1.3 A New Perspective on Body & Dance

Fisher (in Mead 2017:165) refers to the aesthetic ideals and stereotypes that are traditionally associated with ballet, including "form, style and clarity of line". Freefall Dance Company, he says, offers "a different, appealing, aesthetic" (Mead 2017:165). It is important that dancers engage with their art form in a variety of ways, for instance by observing performances, expanding their knowledge on the field of dance and participating in projects (Aujla & Redding 2014:67). Correspondingly, Freefall Dance Company's approach to the training of their students is open and flexible (Aujla & Redding 2014:68). Fisher (in Mead 2017:166-167) also notes that their work is often built on improvisation, which is not traditionally seen as associated with ballet, but instead considered a common characteristic of the contemporary genre. While the methods of Freefall Dance Company are thus open-ended and "difficult to categorise", classical ballet has a clear place in the company's training, productions and performances.

Fisher and Youngson (in mead 2017:170) poetically relate the work of Freefall Dance Company to the work of Piet Mondrian, claiming that, in the same way Mondrian utilised a different palette than his peers at the time – choosing "to work with … squares, rectangles, triangles and colour" – so they too utilise "a different palette to create" art.

Acknowledging the possibility that dancers with disabilities have a smaller selection of shades and "colours to choose from" than many professional able-bodied dancers, they are equally affected by ballet, and their ballet equally affects audiences (Mead 2017:170). Freefall Dance Company is seen as a success in providing the same exposure to dance for individuals with difference as for individuals deemed *normal*. However, barriers persist.

Common assumptions of body and ballet, combined with dominant (negative) perceptions of bodily difference such as disability and disfigurement, distance these bodies from the performing arts. Factors that support the view that ballet is not "for" persons with different abilities and needs include the belief that their inclusion in the art form requires additional expenses and support (Mead 2017:170). Despite Freefall Dance Company's efforts to change perceptions that discriminate, stigmatise and reduce individuals with disabilities and their creative work, these perceptions often remain, positioning such efforts as charitable and philanthropic (Mead 2017:171). Freefall Dance Company nevertheless dynamically contests the barriers posed by these views by reaching extensive audiences through the implementation of workshops and performances, and by the company's overall philosophy that demonstrates the possibilities of including and representing dancers with difference in the (professional) world of performing arts (Mead 2017:171). According to Aujla and Redding (2013:82), Freefall Dance Company is an example of a group that has "written their own qualifications for their dance training and performing activities". Accreditation, they argue, is valuable both for the dancer and his/her progress and for the company's existence within a challenging financial climate, by indicating "tangible outcomes" (Aujla & Redding 2013:82). Taking a multidimensional approach to the company and its dancers, such negative perspectives can also be transformed. I now consider Freefall Dance Company through the elements of control and, thereafter, the dimensions of dance, both as proposed by Hanna.

4.2.1.4 Adaptation, Control & Multidimensionality in Freefall

Hanna's work demonstrates the ways in which dance, in its multidimensionality, can offer a sense of control over stress and pain. As noted, Kleinman separates a medical condition that causes pain from the experience of pain, arguing that the latter results in feelings of

helplessness and fear. This approach aligns with the social model of disability, taking into account the "societal, economic and environmental factors", not only the physical and medical explanation of a given impairment (Scully 2004:651). It also reminds one of the unique experiences that may arise from disability for different individuals. According to research done on dance and healing, control can be found in dance, leading to a minimisation of such feelings (Hanna 1995:326). This can be achieved in four primary ways, discussed in previous sections, namely 1) "possession by the spiritual", involving processes that can be explained through the meta-physical dimension of dance; 2) "mastery of movement", relating to the ways in which the dancers of Freefall Dance Company are encouraged to produce, direct and control their own unique movements; 3) "escape from stress and pain" through changes in emotion or states of consciousness, also associated with the spirituality of body and dance and seen in the confiding environment of Freefall Dance Company where the dancers are not othered, but find trust, relatability and inclusion in one another and in the space of their dancing. The third means of gaining control also relates to Kleiner's exploration of unself-conscious performance. The fourth and final way of gaining control through dance, Hanna (1995:326-328) argues, is by "confronting stressors by projecting them in dance to work through ways of handling them". This process involves the dancers' self-expression of their unique identities, personalities and inner-selves, and the deliberate performance and transmission of their emotions.

There is a definite link between these four means of gaining control and the unselfconscious experience of performance explored by Kleiner, as the inner body-dance dimension comes into play. The last of the four processes deals with the representation, recollection and release of past, current and foreseen feelings such as helplessness, anger and fear. The fact that the representation of these feelings is "without the impact of real life", it allows dancers to "play with them at a distance" and perceive them as "less threatening". This process, in offering a recollection and release from these emotions, can be seen as a cathartic experience (Hanna 1995:326-328).

In the same way this dissertation seeks to adapt the perception of and perspective on disability, disfigurement and ballet, Freefall Dance Company illustrates an adaptive

approach to and consideration of dance *for* dancers with difference. Along with high standards, Aujla and Redding (2014:68) discuss adaptation and differentiation as two critical aspects of the ballet class. In order to effectively adapt dance, it is necessary to establish expectations by, for instance, determining the goal of a particular movement and working to accomplish the goal, as opposed to striving for aesthetic attainment (Aujla & Redding 2014:64). Differentiation refers to the employment of, not one, but various methods of training. This approach accommodates diversity in terms "of learning styles and needs … among all students, disabled and non-disabled" (Aujla & Redding 2014:65). Adaptation and differentiation go hand in hand and, when utilised correctly and efficiently, ensure "that all students are engaged and challenged" (Aujla & Redding 2014:57). Fisher (in Mead 2017:166) acknowledges the (potential) need for a more "facilitative approach" when engaging with dancers with special needs (as opposed to "vocational students"). Subsequently, Freefall Dance Company reveals the ways in which ballet is malleable and capable of accommodating diverse bodies with unique conditions, capacities and needs. As argued by Delgado and Humm-Delgado (2017:114):

> Dance can be modified to include [persons] with disabilities, and no group, regardless of abilities, cannot engage in dance, if accommodations are made to the production.

While the overarching theme of inclusion, empowerment and restoration can be found in all fields of performing arts, Delgado and Humm-Delgado (2017:114) claim that it is especially recognised as a "reward of dance and physical movement". This illustrates the appeal of dance in its simultaneous facilitation of positive effects for individuals with disabilities (whether physical or cognitive), and integration of fun, diverse and instructional education (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:114). I have earlier considered a number of the benefits of dance for these individuals, including (but not limited to) "fun and enjoyment" in a social context, increasing "self-empowerment and self-efficacy", "sharing one's experiences … and emotions", creativity and self-expression, and developing individual strengths (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:111). These benefits are seen as personal rewards and aid in constructing a restorative community (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:111).

Kehinde Ishangi (in Mattingly 2021:183) touches on the subject of multidimensionality, by claiming that "ballet is given depth and beauty by the multi-layered identities I bring to it". The essence and philosophies of Freefall Dance Company, instrumental to a collective endeavour to include, represent and empower individuals who are otherwise subjected to severe discrimination and stigma, can be considered through multidimensionality and the connection between ballet and body. Fisher (2007) deems the technical aspect of ballet as its most significant constituent, serving at the same time as its "most unifying" element and, potentially, its most "destructive". Perhaps it is once again necessary to point out that such contrasting experiences of ballet lies not in the art form itself, but in the ideological constructions that surround it. For instance, while one ballet teacher or a certain environment may oppress, stigmatise and discriminate, resulting in a "destructive" experience for the dancer, another ballet teacher or a different environment may celebrate individuality and difference, resulting in a "unifying" and empowering experience for the dancer. The characteristics that result in these varying experience ought to ascribe to the trainer and/or training space, and not to the art of ballet itself. Recollecting the main focus of dance ethnography, this dissertation regards the dance, rather than the dominant social groups that shape our perceptions of dance (Edwards 2001:491).

The dimensions of dance can be seen in the daily structure and programme, as well as the performance(s), of Freefall Dance Company. Considering the physical or bodily dimension of dance, Freefall Dance Company represents a space comprising both studio and stage experience. The company's endeavours include rehearsals (studio) and performances (stage). These spaces are intentionally adapted to the needs of individuals with cognitive disabilities in providing them the opportunity for access, participation, representation and empowerment as outlined in the APRE framework (Collins *et al* 2013). The cultural dimension of dance is seen also in the adaptive nature of Freefall Dance Company and its purpose of creating an expressive, creative and artistic space of dance *for* these individuals. Cultural components mentioned before highlight the company's disruption of hierarchical, often oppressive, structures of organisations that may represent ballet in a negative and harmful light by practicing discriminatory and exclusionary ideologies. Freefall Dance Company also demonstrates the cognitive

dimension of dance in its deliberate positioning of its members as active contributors and creators, involving them in the process of assembling and producing its works.

The last two dimensions of dance, dealing with emotional and spiritual aspects, have been shown to relate to the third dimension of the body, creating a link which I have termed the inner body-dance dimension. A typical ballet class starts at the barre (a horizontal bar, used for a hand rest and for support), providing dancers with a warmup to prepare them for the rest of the class. According to Fisher (in Mead 2017:166), this section of the class "gives [the dancers] something they all do together" affording them "ownership over a dance language". Nevertheless, he points out that the technical aspects of dance are simply the starting point. The significance lies in what can be achieved therewith. As pointed out in Chapter Two, it is necessary to consider equally the science of physical movement and the art of dance in order to sufficiently and multidimensionally understand and interpret the experience of dance – or, in Fitt's (in Dixon 2005:76) terms, the mind-body link within dance. Freefall Dance Company's approach in itself represents the reconsideration of dominant perspectives on ballet that Brinson and Dick (in Dixon 205:76) refer to – a reconsideration that is not only essential, but also welcomed in the dance community. Directly relating to the inner body-dance dimension, Fisher (in mead 2017:166) proves the possibility for restoring both body and ballet, arguing that the essence and language of ballet is universal, providing "a sense of group identity and security". Freefall Ballet Company embraces and embodies this language that makes up ballet, as Mead (2017:166) asserts that it "is firmly embedded in [the company's] practice". The company's pursuit of presenting its dancers' creative expression, unique identities and ideas in performances, and its concern with their security, empowerment and spiritual well-being, all contribute to this innermost dimension of body and ballet.

4.2.1.5 Empowering the Othered

As mentioned earlier, according to common beliefs, persons with disabilities are primarily included in the dance world merely through therapeutic and community settings. Eisenhauer (2007:9) therefore calls for a careful distinction between the terms "disabled people doing art" – which involves the admiration of difference – from "disability artists" – which involves the active participation of individuals with difference

in the arts and a subsequent challenge of ableism and other discriminating ideologies. Eisenhauer's perspective is emphasised throughout this dissertation, claiming that the latter expression allows for a reconsideration that designates the art form (in this case, ballet) as the vehicle for change, as opposed positioning it as the problem. Instead, the art of ballet can be seen as capable of addressing the social beliefs that prove harmful towards individuals with disfigurement and disability, and towards ballet itself (Eisenhauer 2007:10). Eisenhauer (2007) proposes an integrated approach that allows for change in the space of the studio – change that inhibits discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation of these individuals. Empowerment, defined in Chapter Two, serves to thoroughly foster, uplift and celebrate a group or individual's potential(s) (Collins *et al* 2021:322). Engaging in dance beyond therapeutic circumstances, can thus be considered a significant step towards empowerment for Freefall Dance Company's members (Collins *et al* 2021:313).

It is important to note that Fisher and Youngson proudly categorise the company as exclusive and selective, positioning it external to the type of setting referred to above. Fisher (in Mead 2017:171) claims that the company does not have "an open door policy", for this would prevent them from pursuing their vision and mission to celebrate the dancers' "individual and collective gifts". This is precisely what makes the company special, unique and a powerful platform that represents and empowers individuals with difference. While these objectives are at the heart of the company, Mead emphasises that Fisher and Youngson are indeed not against the idea of having open access, pointing to the ways in which "new strands for Freefall [Dance Company] are slowly being established" (2017:171). Consequently, *Junior Freefall* came into existence, catering for "gifted, talented and enthusiastic" Fox Hollies students between the ages of eleven and nineteen, in the form of "an out-of-hours dance club" (McNulty 2013). At a later stage and age, these dancers advance to the main company (Mead 2017:171). The company is also hopeful to launch a *Little Freefallers* division in the near future, catering for primary level students, as well as possible weekly classes arranged for and open to any individual with a (learning/cognitive) disability (Mead 2017:171).

Aujla and Redding (2014:68) refer to specialised training and integrated training as two approaches to the inclusion of dancers with disabilities in the world of dance – the former caters solely for dancers with disabilities, while the latter integrates both disabled and able-bodied dancers. Determining which of the two is more beneficial is certainly debatable. Specialised dance may relieve dancers from potential comparison between disabled and able-bodied students. However, integrated dance is believed to be accompanied by shared feelings "of unity and opportunities for socialising" (Aujla & Redding 2014:66). Placing disabled and able-bodied dancers in the same space may allow for the cultivation of meaningful relationships. Thus, acknowledging the potential in both approaches, Aujla and Redding (2014:66) propose that the best methodology of teaching dance would involve both specialised and integrated opportunities and occasions – an example of this is Freefall Dance Company. Freefall Dance Company employs both methods of training by 1) offering specialised classes for dancers with cognitive disabilities, but also 2) integrating able-bodied dancers into performance settings.

4.2.1.6 Restoration in the Space of Freefall

Recognising the undesirable positioning of ballet by certain ideologies, Fisher (2007) claims that, superficially, it appears that ballet must "justify itself within community dance". Speaking to the difference between ballet and the ideologies that seek to appropriate it, Fisher (2007) explains:

> At times the loyalty to [ballet's] traditions can be misplaced, in terms of a creative dialogue a permissive environment doesn't always exist within the studio and arguably ballet can be alienating and exclusive. However, it needn't be. Ballet has never been a static art-form and it will continue to evolve. With creative and sensitive application the art-form can be accessible to all and offer many of the same benefits to professional and community dancer alike.

Institutions such as Freefall Dance Company – although argued to remain unparalleled by organisations with similar objectives – collectively construct a framework that challenges the "stereotypical views of ballet, of dance, by dancers and those who come to see it" (Mead 2017:171). Significantly, Freefall Dance Company does so by actively and powerfully demonstrating the possibilities for its members to engage in the art of dance, without being confined to a social or studio space or a therapeutic environment. The company moreover presents high quality performances, providing role models to

young students and spectators with difference (Mead 2017:171). Sharing this view, McNulty (2013) and other scholars consider the company as successful in its pursuit of providing opportunities for these dancers "to act as role models and inspire" others.

According to the Birmingham Royal Ballet ([sa]) website, the establishment of Freefall Dance Company was initiated when Fisher realised the talent and "beauty in the unique movements of" Fox Hollies' dancers. Linking with the ideas set out in the previous chapter regarding the *ability* of dancers with disability, as opposed to regarding their *disability*, Fisher (in Mead 2017:167) claims that his own imagination and mindset is incapable of creating the movements that are innovatively produced by Freefall Dance Company's members. He labels two central aspects of the company as 1) humour and 2) foundational narrative(s) and character(s) (Mead 2017:167). The importance is not on classical form, but rather on the energy of the movements and their authenticity. Nevertheless, Fisher seeks to incorporate the former characteristic into their dancing. The most crucial element of the company's method of dancing is a respect for individuality (Mead 2017:167). Youngson (in Mead 2017:167) agrees, describing the company as "highly [personalised]", and demonstrating the way in which each dancer's unique abilities and skills (as well as their needs). As noted by Campbell (2009:29), the dancer's position enables a self-representation of his/her credibility as an artist. This has been shown to occur "with or without mention of [one's] disability". A counter-perspective of disability subsequently emerges, presenting the artist (person) *first* and the disability *second* (Campbell 2009:29). In agreement with Campbell's findings, without overlooking disability, Fisher (in Mead 2017:172) proposes that changing negative perceptions and attitudes of dancers with difference can only be achieved "by putting the art first" and by producing a "positive, inspiring experience". This approach prevents the reduction of an individual to his/her difference and highlights the *ability* of an individual, rather than his/her *disability* (Campbell 2009:29). The nature of such representation aids in the progression "towards a future … free from the preconceptions of how a dancer could or should look" (Campbell 2009:29). Various academics produce parallel observations and subsequent suggestions. Similar to Eisenhauer, Collins *et al* (2021:321) insist that the constructive potential of art, exceeding therapy-oriented and leisurely dance activities, must be recognised. Furthermore, aligning with the arguments of Campbell and Fisher,

Collins *et al* (2021:321) also argue that regarding an individual and his/her art as opposed to regarding his/her difference is of equal importance. There is a mutual assertion that the artist must be elevated above his/her difference in order to effectively break down dominant perceptions of ballet and difference (Collins *et al* 2021:320). Freefall Dance Company counters dominant perceptions, flourishing as an exemplary organisation *for* dancers with disabilities. This company is therefore considered an institution that is set out to challenge and amaze both locally and internationally, portraying its dancers' individual talents, styles and artistry (Birmingham Royal … [sa]).

The establishment of Freefall Dance Company aimed to "provide a training and performing platform for" individuals with (severe) cognitive disabilities (Fisher 2007). Embedded in the company's philosophy is the goal of uniting 1) high-quality "community dance practice", along "with its principles of empowerment, creativity and ownership", with 2) the fundamentals of ballet, such as its technical standards, "attention to detail and discipline" (Fisher 2007). The initiatives of Freefall Dance Company include the "disability awareness intervention" implemented by Fox Hollies, workshops held by the company both in special and general educational environments. In a review by Dancing Times magazine, the company is described as a "treasure" of Birmingham "to be cherished and supported, claiming also that it constantly succeeds in "enriching … lives" (Birmingham Royal … [sa]). The inclusivity of the company lies in its association and combined efforts of Birmingham Royal Ballet, Fox Hollies and the community in general. According to an article on the Birmingham Royal Ballet's ([sa]) website, Freefall Dance Company members gain pride through their own dancing and in that they inspire one another. Dancers have the opportunity to self-express without feeling confined by or being made aware of their disabilities. The company unfailingly surpasses "expectations and stereotypes", producing breathtaking "routines admired by critics" (Birmingham Royal … [sa]).

Fisher (2007) openly acknowledges the power and capacity of ballet, asserting that "[b]allet brings much to Freefall". One of the company's current members, Josef Reed, served as a founding member of the *Junior* division. Reed's mother credits the company for positively impacting the quality of life for her son, claiming that he:

> … has lived and breathed dance for as long as I can remember. Dance has helped Josef with his communication, concentration, movement, muscle tone and posture. When he performs he comes alive. There's a little spark of joy there… I hope that he'll always have Freefall (McNulty 2013).

The multidimensional capacity of ballet and its relationship with to the body are powerfully illustrated in this statement, through Reed's reliance on Freefall Dance Company – as well as ballet in general – to facilitate (both physical and psychological) healing and restoration. Ballet is seen as affirmative and constructive, and its part in inclusion and empowerment of individuals with difference is revealed through the mother's testimony.

Recollecting another theme discussed by Campbell (2009), Freefall Dance Company produces performances by individuals with disability that do not evoke sympathy, but instead appreciation and, perhaps, also envy. This occurs due to the realisation that these individuals' unique movements can be but admired, and not replicated, by individuals that are not disabled (Campbell 2009:29). Freefall Dance Company has become "part of the wider … community of ballet", says Fisher (2007). He uses the term "wonderful" to describe the audiences' generous reception and affirmation of Freefall Dance Company's performances (Fisher 2007). The company affords its members "a space for expression" and for producing empowering experiences for and representations of these individuals (le Roux *et al* 2021:2). As argued by le Roux *et al* (2021:2), these endeavours challenge dominant, negative perceptions of ballet – that present it as exclusive, discriminating and undesirable – and of bodily difference – that present it as fragile, weak and dependent. As shown by Collins *et al* (2021:321), art itself provides opportunities for independence by supporting the development of "physical capabilities, education and training". Freefall Dance Company's philosophy, structure and influential undertakings illustrate a different perspective on ballet and body – one that allows for the restoration of both.

4.2.2 Semiotic Analysis

In this section, I conduct a semiotic analysis of two videos, or films, that feature Freefall Dance Company. Due to the fact that these films are intended as performances in themselves – in other words, the film *is* the product of the artwork/project – I consider the footage as a key subject of analysis. In other words, these films are not documentations

of performances, but rather the performances in and of themselves. I analyse these two films through a multidimensional lens, in order not only to demonstrate the evidence of the multidimensionality of dance in both films, but more importantly to expose the potentials for social inclusion and empowerment of the body in ballet that can be facilitated through the endeavours of organisations such as Freefall Dance Company. In turn, ballet itself can also be restored through the breakdown of harmful tropes, stigmas, myths and misconceptions of the art form. The first dimension of dance, the bodily or physical dimension, can be analysed in both films through consideration of various signs, such as the dancers' movements, the choreography, the music, as well as captured instances of training and repetition that takes place in the studio space. Semiotic consideration of such signs also signify further dimensions of body and ballet, as this analysis will illustrate.

Figure 29: We Dance Screenshot - Link of bodies on stage (Mencap 2012)

The first video is a performance film, produced as part of a "Cultural Olympiad dance project for" individuals with cognitive disabilities in Birmingham and surrounding areas (Garside & Marshall 2013). The project is said to have opened up new challenges to Freefall Dance Company's members – both the dancers and the teachers. The company played an influential role in the facilitation of the project. As part of the *We Dance* project, Freefall Dance Company performed *The Clean Sweep* at the festival. The piece showcases

"forty-five minutes of complex choreography" (Paul Harris 2012). *We Dance* was directed by the "learning disability charity" known as Mencap (Garside & Marshall 2013). It was presented at the "2012 Normal Festival in Prague" (McNulty 2013). While the video that I analyse here is not the performance of *The Clean Sweep* in itself, it features the Freefall dancers in a montage-style dance film, both in the space of the studio and stage (compare Figures 31 and 32), and it serves perhaps as an artistic preview or introduction to the company's involvement in the overall project. Later in the same year, this video was published on YouTube by Mencap. The meaning behind the project was to enhance the inclusive platform(s) for dance, creativity, confrontation of dominant myths and misperceptions, and improvement of health and wellbeing (Garside & Marshall 2013).

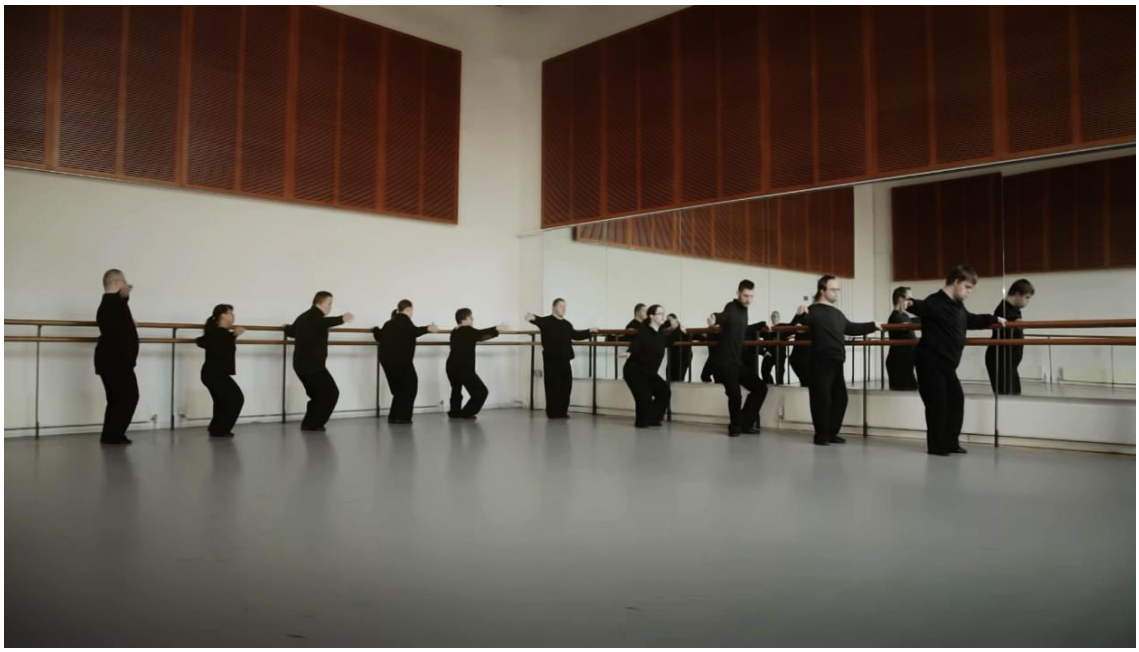

Figure 30: We Dance Screenshot – Dancers training at the barre (Mencap 2012)

The film opens with a montage, or various brief close up shots, of the following scenes: a woman's hair tied in a ponytail, a man fastening the laces of his dance shoes, dancers' legs executing *pliés*, *tendus* and balances, a hand resting on the barre, arms reaching toward the mirror as the dancers bend sideways, warming up of the feet, and the faces of dancers whilst training at the barre. All of these moments are captured in a studio environment, as seen in Figure 32. As this section of the film draws to an end, the dancers

are seen freely bending and stretching their bodies in the center of the studio. The dancers are all dressed in black shirts and pants of the same style, symbolising uniformity and a sense of formality (see Figure 33). The following scene, shown in Figure 31, depicts a different environment: the stage. Spotlights and a black background can be detected in this space, showcasing the dancers' movements again in brief close-up shots. The film then jumps back to the studio scene(s), showing the dancers again in their warm-up session. A different studio space is then presented, shown in Figure 34. Through this studio's large windows, other buildings are visible in the background, and the incoming light from outside creates a silhouette of a man dancing in the space. The film transitions back to the initial studio space, presenting the dancers training at the barre and, this time, also executing what seems to be improvised movements in the center of the room, before transitioning back to the second studio. There are now three dancers performing in this space, again only their silhouettes visible. The scene shifts again, back to the stage, depicting the same three dancers, each in his/her own spotlight. Throughout the film, the scenes continue to transition back and forth between these spaces. A closer shot of a female dancer's movements is produced in slow motion. Each dancer is focused upon in different moments, portraying – but moreover, celebrating – their own movements. There are various moments of interaction among the dancers – they perform similar movements, yet it seems each dancer uniquely executes his/her own interpretation thereof. At one point, the dancers form a link one-by-one (Figure 31). Coupled dancers interact through free, flowing movements. One scene depicts a male dancer gradually opening and extending his arms to first uncover his face and then reach outwards and sideways, symbolic of the act of opening himself, his personality and expression, up to the audience and the experience of performance. Similarly, another male dancer opens his hand in front of his face, almost resembling a gesture of a blossoming flower. The movements throughout the performance are smooth, continuous, flowing. At times, these movements become more forceful and swift. The dancing aligns with the music – a classical piano piece, yet with a modern disposition – building and progressing as the dancers' motions become more vigorous. The contrasts and dynamics found in these movements perhaps symbolise a fluidity not merely of the physical body, but moreover of the internal (third dimension) body, identity and self.

Figure 31: We Dance Screenshot – Dancers' clothing, in the space of the studio (Mencap 2012)

Figure 32: We Dance Screenshot - Silhouettes (Mencap 2012)

The film returns to the space of the studio, portraying the dancers in an aligned formation. One dancer is positioned in the front and center of the formation, smiling at and making eye contact with the camera. This seems to be the first moment that exhibits a definite facial expression, as the rest of the time, the dancers almost appear calm and

expressionless. As the final note of the piano sounds, this dancer lifts his arms into a gesture that communicates a playful shrug, as if to say: “this is us”, representing the company with a proud, contented smile. The music stops and credits appear on screen. Background sounds can be heard, including the voice of an instructor calling and encouraging each dancer to enjoy their moment in front of the camera. The dancers take turns to step into the “spotlight” and perform improvised movements to a fun, rhythmic piano piece, perhaps played by a live pianist as accompaniment to the class. The enjoyment is evident in the dancers’ expressions and movements in this section of the film.

Figure 33: We Are Here Screenshot - Conflict & entrance (Birmingham Royal ... 2019)

The second video is also a performance film, published on YouTube by Birmingham Royal Ballet in 2019, titled *We Are Here*. As noted earlier, Freefall Dance Company presents yearly productions and performance films for “dance-for-screen festivals” – an example, along with *We Dance*, is the film, *We Are Here*, that premiered at the San Francisco Film Festival (Birmingham Royal … 2019). The production was shot by Sima Gonsai and Chris Keenan, and choreographed by Fisher. It is said to be “inspired by the Lunt Fort Coventry” and produced in collaboration with two “former Birmingham Royal Ballet Principal dancers Jenna Roberts and Iain Mackay”. The music is composed by

Richard Syner, "performed by the Royal Ballet Sinfona [and] conducted by [the company's] Principal Conductor Paul Murphy" (Birmingham Royal … 2019).

The film opens with a shot of a gravel path, leading to an entrance of an unknown area. Two dancers (Roberts and Mackay) step onto the path. Brief moments capture one of the Freefall dancers, moving slowly, simply and calmly on what seems to be a balcony. The two dancers below start dancing with one another, producing movements that symbolise and evoke a sense of an argument between them (see Figure 35). As the female dancer attempts to move towards the entrance, the male dancer pulls her back, picks her up and turns her in the opposite direction – as if saying, "don't go there". The Freefall dancer on the balcony notices these two dancers in conflict, and invites them in (see Figure 37). The couple cautiously move inside and the camera reveals an open and outdoor space filled with wooden constructs such as stairs, bridges and platforms, what seems to be a farmhouse and a large round area enclosed with a fence of wooden poles. The dancers are captured one by one, or in two's, presenting their movements – distinct, yet similar. Inside the enclosure, the rest of the Freefall dancers are standing motionless, poised in various poses and positioned in three lines and three columns. As the couple enters this space, the dancers start moving, seeming to demonstrate to the couple *how* to dance – then, attempting these movements, they gradually start to join in. All of the dancers are dressed in normal, everyday clothing. There is, however, a sense of uniformity in that they wear the same type of clothing – pants and shirts in various greys, greens and maroon. After the couple curiously attempts the movements of the other dancers, they proceed to crouch in front of the group and observe the continuation of their performance. The couple is once again invited to join the performance and what seems like a playful dance-off or dance battle soon starts taking place between the male and female dancer and two Freefall dancers. The rest of the dancers continue to dance in the background. Each dancer's movements are unique, appearing to be improvised and natural, however all of their movements match in that they are smooth, flowing and easy. At times, these movements are captured and shown in slow motion. There is an overwhelming sense of calmness and freeness throughout the performance. At the end of the performance, one dancer is lifted into the air by the others, the rest of the dancers closely surrounding her in a group, forming a compact formation. The camera gradually zooms out, fixed on this final pose.

Figure 34: We Are Here Screenshot - An invitation to dance (Birmingham Royal ... 2019)

Throughout the film, the musical accompaniment is a calm acoustic melody of piano and guitar, paired with symphonic instrumental harmonies. At the time of the dance battle or challenge, the music slightly grows to become more tense, but it remains playful, sounding staccato piano notes.

Both films involve improvised movements, to various extents. Improvisation, often the foundation of Freefall Dance Company's style, is not traditionally considered a characteristic of ballet (Mead 2017:166-167). While, perhaps, Fisher intended through this point to position Freefall Dance Company as an innovative contemporary institution, considering ballet from a new and different perspective, his argument is debatable and perhaps insufficient in its vagueness. According to Curtis Carter (2000), improvisation, although not a requirement or core element, has always had a place in ballet. While set choreography (or repertoire) and structured syllabi dominate the practice of ballet, improvisation is a quality that associates with the genre in a number of ways. Famous figures from earlier centuries – Fanny Elssler, Marie Taglioni and Anna Pavlova, to name a few – and their successors added "improvisational embellishments" to their individual performances (Carter 2000:183). Carter (2000:183) argues that it is such dancers'

"special, interpretive gifts" that allow for this form of improvisation, which can be seen in personal portrayals of characters and attitudes, as well as the individuality of bodies, technical virtuosity and imaginations. Subsequently, improvisation in ballet does take place, no matter how subtly, in the space of the stage. Turning to the space of the studio, Carter (2000:183) also points to instances in which improvisation occurs in the genre of ballet, taking Balanchine as example. Choreographers such as Balanchine "extend the range of the classical ballet syntax through their inventions", says Carter (2000:183). Much of Balanchine's choreography was created "on the spot" and often evolved from dancers' spontaneous or even accidental movements (Carter 2000:183). Carter (2000:183) also credits improvisation for extending ballet's "vocabulary and theatrical context", using William Forsythe's fascinating incorporation of improvisation with various mediums, such as "amplified noises produced by the dancers", as an example. From my own experience as a ballet teacher, improvisation is also commonly seen in the arrangement and structure of ballet examinations, intending to stimulate young dancers' creative capabilities – spontaneous, creative dancing to musical accompaniments with various dispositions is considered an important building block for the cultivation of artistry and sensitivity in students. Therefore, while recognising that improvisation is not a primary or compulsory component that defines ballet, it must indeed be considered a component that is present and effective in the genre.

The purpose of my reflection on Fisher's statement is not intended as an attack on Fisher, but rather a validation of Freefall Dance Company's performances as *ballet*, despite the fact that some of the dancer's movements are improvised. Furthermore, besides validating the role of improvisation in ballet, I also, on the other hand, wish to point out that Fisher's statement could easily be misunderstood or exaggerated to imply that Freefall Dance Company *only* relies on improvisation and does not follow the typical choreographic or repertory practice of ballet. Fisher clearly admits that much of the company's work is built on improvisation, but he does not state that it is *always* the case. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, *The Clean Sweep* is a forty-five-minute piece of intricate choreography (Paul Harris 2012). *We Dance* thus portrays the Freefall dancers in the creation and performance of choreography, as opposed to merely permitting the dancers to improvise freely. This portrayal opposes myths about people with cognitive disabilities

in highlighting the dancers' physical, creative and cognitive *abilities*. The preset structure of the ballet class – along with its constructive capabilities – is also relevant and apparent in the *We Dance* film, when the dancers are shown in the studio, during their warmup classes and rehearsals. According to Fisher (2007), the "progressive sequence of barre exercises gives a holistic and ready-made model" that facilitates the development of control, suppleness, coordination and strength. This section of the ballet class provides the dancers with "a fundamental understanding of the principles of ballet" that "empowers the self-identification or explicit tangible goals to work towards, the acquisition of these new skills create a pride and pleasure which nurture self-esteem" (Fisher 2007). Fisher (2007) thus credits ballet and the skills it has provided the dancers, ultimately allowing them to use "the language of ballet" to communicate cross-culturally. In addition, such technical aspects are seen to enable and enhance creativity. Subsequently, Fisher (2007) emphasises the importance of the technical training of ballet, claiming that it has resulted in exciting changes within the company and its dancers' artistic capabilities. Moreover, the symbolic relevance of the technical aspect of ballet shown in the performance, particularly in the *We Dance* film, contests myths that position the disabled body as incapable, as well as myths that disregard the positive attributes of ballet, such as its physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual value discussed above.

The cultural elements of dance can be considered in the space in which the two performances take place and the motivation(s) that led to their creation. The dancers' performance attire also plays a significant role in the cultural meaning behind these performances. The aesthetic ideologies of ballet have been shown to seek a very specific body, one that has become normalised and idealised (Clark 2018:81). This stereotypical image of the ballerina dominates common understandings of ballet. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, such stereotypical views on ballet, in themselves, reveal a significant lack of multidimensional awareness and understanding, and the subsequent shortcomings of these dominant approaches to body and dance. I have shown that a multidimensional perspective on ballet and bodies opens up the possibility of liberating both subjects from these destructive ideologies. The films I analyse in this section can be considered in the ways that they challenge and reform such customary ideas, and illustrate the potential for the restoration of ballet and body. The two films by Freefall Dance Company yield great

socio-cultural significance that may enable destigmatisation, social inclusion and empowerment, both in breaking down common problems within the studio, and in confronting discriminating myths and stereotypes of *othered* bodies. This occurs in various ways, including the dancers' clothing, the unconventional nature of their movements and the positioning of the spectator within the space of the dance.

Figure 35: We Are Here Screenshot – Dancers' clothing, in the space of the stage (Birmingham Royal … 2019)

As argued by Clark (2018:80), dominant ideological understandings of ballet position it as "oppressive and victimising". The two films serve as examples of a reconsideration of ballet, and in contrast, present ballet in its multidimensional capacity to empower, and give voice and agency to those who dance – in this case, dancers with cognitive disabilities. The films firmly challenge dominant myths and assumptions regarding the aesthetics and perspectives of ballet by dressing the dancers in non-traditional performance attire. The stereotypical ballet costume is replaced by common clothing (Eiss 2013:74). *We Are Here* show the dancers dressed in loose-fitting everyday clothing – black pants, long and short sleeved shirts in a variety of greys, greens and maroon, and what appears to be running/dance sneakers (see Figure 38). In the *We Dance* film, the dancers are dressed in black loose-fitting pants and long sleeved shirts, wearing black

dancing shoes (see Figure 33). To a certain extent, there is a sense of unity in their clothing, yet the performances still pose as a direct confrontation of the dominant ideological aesthetic of ballet that associates it with the classical tutu, pointe shoes, formfitting leggings or stockings, and dazzling hairpieces. In addition, in contrast to the typical appearance of the stage performer, the dancers' faces are not coated in heavy makeup, but instead they are presented in their naturalness. The performances by Freefall Dance Company depict the dancers in a natural way, free from shiny embellishments. This representation strongly symbolises a sense of normality, relatability and authenticity within the performances.

Aujla and Redding (2013:80), like others, are critical of the aesthetic myths and stereotypes surrounding ballet, noting that their reinforcement is a foundation for exclusion in dance – such as the evaluation of dancers' "body shape and size rather than their potential, passion or creativity" in auditioning and adjudicating contexts. This causes a barrier for dancers with disabilities that may not conform to these standards of what has been termed the "ballet body", rejecting them and deeming them incompatible with the art form (Aujla & Redding 2013:80). Once again, as Mattingly (2021:184) and others have crucially pointed out, the problematics behind these structures are the "assumptions about ballet", and not ballet in itself. Earlier, I referred to Fisher's (in Mead 2017:165) description of Freefall Dance Company's style as "a different, appealing, aesthetic". The movements executed by the dancers in both performances may not resemble traditional, technically advanced ballet steps. The choreography of these dances do not include grand big leaps and extended legs at great angles, nor do the female dancers twirl around in pointe shoes. However, the dancers move in gracefully interesting and aesthetically pleasing ways, producing art that moves audiences, both in terms of internal emotion and in terms of provoking socio-cultural change. These movements and the dancers that perform them challenge the aesthetics and ideologies that seek to attach to ballet a stereotypical dancing body.

Figure 36: We Are Here Screenshot – In the space of the dance (Birmingham Royal … 2019)

The space of performance in both films is significant to this analysis. The space of the stage in *We Dance* is free from aesthetic and ornamental distractions. Aside from the dancers, the space is empty. In the space of *We Are Here*, the dancers perform in an unconventional space, outside of the theatre space, in an open outdoor area. Eloisa Ferrer (2020) explains that the production of a piece external to a controlled, traditional theatre space offers "freedom to create" and to shape a performance environment from elements that are not usually found within this space. *We Are Here* is an example of such intentionally constructed performance circumstances. Moreover, the dancers and the spectators journey through a variety of scenes and spaces – in other words, there are multiple performance spaces in a single performance. This film, according to Ferrer (2020), can be considered "a powerful tool … to reach out to the community and expose the [performance] to a more diverse audience". Performances such as *We Are Here*, taking place in a non-traditional space, communicates a powerful message: "[you have to] meet us where we are" (Leonard-Rose in Petrovia 2017). It demonstrates a refusal to work "with the convention of theatre or stage dance" (Leonard-Rose in Petrovia 2017). Furthermore, on a symbolic level, the theme of freedom and liberation is prominent in the setting of the performance being outdoors in an open space, rather than indoors on a stage (see Figure 39).

Figure 37: We Dance Screenshot – Spotlights in the space of the stage nr.1 (Mencap 2012)

The audience, at some point(s), shares the space of the stage with the dancers, resulting in the collapse of the boundary between self and other. At various moments captured on stage in the *We Dance* film, the camera is positioned to look directly into the spotlights, as opposed to displaying the performance from an audience perspective, once again creating the sense of the viewer sharing the space with the dancer (see Figures 40 and 41). *We Are Here* brings about a similar effect, in that the camera circles around and entangles within the performance, capturing the dancers from various, continuously moving angles. Kleiner's theory is amplified in such a space, releasing the dancer from potentially experiencing or perceiving their difference while performing as well as releasing the spectator from a potentially criticising gaze (see Figure 39). In both films, the spectator is immersed in the dance, uniting self and other. The natural divide between dancer and spectator, stage and audience, collapses in such non-traditional spaces of and viewpoints on performance. By surrounding the spectator with the dance, the two performances by Freefall can be perceived and interpreted not for the difference in the bodies of the dancers, but for the story they choose to tell through their dancing. In turn, this allows for a release from harmful stereotypes and myths that stigmatise and exclude those with disabilities. The dancers are afforded agency and are thus free to reconstruct their identities, not according to these beliefs, but according to their true, lived experiences and

selves. In doing so, these individuals are empowered through their engagement with and performance of ballet.

Figure 38: We Dance Screenshot – Spotlights in the space of the stage nr.2 (Mencap 2012)

The cognitive dimension of dance is revealed both in the choreography of *We Dance* and in the testimonies given by the trainers, the dancers and/or their families. It is now known that *The Clean Sweep*, produced as part of the *We Dance* project, consisted of a full, dense and complex forty-five-minute choreographed piece that was performed by Freefall Dance Company (Paul Harris 2012). Despite the company's habitual reliance on improvisation, it is clear that the dancers are more than capable of learning, moulding and performing such high calibre choreography. According to Garside (in McNulty 2013), Mencap's national arts development manager:

> Freefall always astound me in the articulacy of their movement, especially remarkable for a group of individuals who are, in relative terms, verbally less articulate than most.

Once again, common myths that associate cognitive disabilities with intellectual, physical and creative incapability are contested through the performance of such choreography. Ballet's cognitive dimension can also be seen here as a means of physically and literally aiding and improving the conditions of Freefall Dance Company's members. Testament

of this, as noted by Reed's mother, the company has positively impacted the quality of her son's life, improving his communication and concentration (McNulty 2013).

The emotional and spiritual dimensions of dance can be seen in the dancers' expressions and experiences in the space of the studio and stage. The Freefall dancers oppose the stereotypical "ballet body" and the ableist myths and stereotypes that slander ballet and bodily difference. They do so by proudly representing their bodies, identities, and their difference, on stage. It has been shown by Clark (2018:88) that the practice and performance of ballet does not depend on the aesthetic ideals demanded by dominant ideologies. The Freefall dancers express an acceptance of their bodies by acknowledging, even praising, each other's and their own "personal contextual realities" (Clark 2018:87). The dancers are not compared to one another. Instead, their individual strengths and unique identities are celebrated within the company. The *We Dance* film effectively symbolises the company's understanding and acceptance of the body in its multiplicity (Clark 2018:91). BBC News correspondent David Sillito (in Paul Harris 2012) describes the dancers individually: "Nikita just loves to dance … Paul is something of a natural extrovert … and the young Joe, this is his life's ambition … this is the resident company comedian, Barry".

Another Freefall dancer, named Chris, is said to be "the reason for Freefall". Fisher argues that this particular dancer inspired the establishment of the company nearly two decades ago (Paul Harris 2012). Fisher (in Paul Harris 2012) describes Chris as a "fantastic, beautiful classical dancer", and he believes that many professional ballet dancers "would look at Chris and think: I wish I could do some the stuff he does." Campbell's notion of appreciation and envy is powerfully manifested through this statement. A similar observation can be made in analysing the plot development of *We Are Here*. The couple's hesitancy to enter the space may signify a reluctance or fear to engage with the Freefall dancers. This can be related to common societal responses to disability (and disfigurement). In this particular example, the confident, self-assured and empowering position is overturned, occupied by the Freefall dancers who invite the couple in and show them how to dance. Such symbolism speaks to the necessary change required in social perceptions of bodily difference by 1) overturning the conventional, dichotomal social

positions of the normative/conforming and the non-normative/nonconforming, and 2) gradually presenting self-other interaction as curious, interesting and positive. As the Freefall dancers demonstrate to the couple *how* to move, Campbell's notion of appreciation and envy can again be observed. Rather than criticising the Freefall dancers' movements, the couple are intrigued and fascinated, cautiously attempting to mimic them and curiously observing them from a crouched position.

Many other powerful symbolic moments can be detected upon analysing the Freefall films. One such moment (at the end) of *We Are Here* is shown in Figure 42, when one female dancer is raised into the air by the others. This may be symbolic of unity, communicating the company's evident commitment to lifting one another up, rather than bringing or beating them down.

Figure 39: We Are Here Screenshot – Lifting one another up (Birmingham Royal … 2019)

There are moments in both films that are shown in slow motion. Perhaps these moments force the viewer to observe the dancer(s), or make the viewer look more closely and thoughtfully. It can be argued the effect of slow motion pulls out the emotions of the dancers in an artistic manner. Such moments also offer the possibility for a visual dissection of the dancers and their performance. The scenes captured and produced in

slow motion further immerse the viewer into the dance and also illuminate the seamlessness and smoothness of the dancers' movements. This once again counters ableist myths and stereotypes that deem the disabled body as incapable, ungraceful, unsightly and out of control. As noted, the overarching mood of both performances involves a sense of calmness and freeness, particularly in *We Are Here*. The effect of the slowed down moments artistically captures this peaceful disposition.

Figure 40: We Dance Screenshot - Opening up (Mencap 2012)

At certain times, the dancers are represented as a group, or as individuals interacting with one another in unspoken ways. The dance battle in *We Are Here* is a playful interaction between two couples. At one point in the *We Dance* film, the dancers form a chain by stepping on stage one by one and moving into a line, connected by their bodies linking in some way, such as by a hand placed on another's shoulder (see Figure 31). At other times, the dancers are represented individually. As stated earlier, each dancer receives their individual moment, portraying their own movements. This not only occurs in the way that they uniquely perform and interpret their own movements. It also occurs in other moments, such as when in the *We Dance* film, a male dancer gradually opens and extends his arms to first uncover his face and then reach outwards and sideways, shown in Figure 42. This may be symbolic of his self-expression, his representation of his identity and his

willingness to share his experience with the audience. Another male dancer executes a movement that can be interpreted in a similar way, opening his hand in front of his face. Another significant moment that celebrates the individuality and identities of the dancers, in this film, is when three dancers are depicted on stage, each dancing in their own spotlight, shown in Figure 43. By placing the dancers in three different spotlights on the stage, as opposed to having them share one large spotlight, emphasises the individual celebration of each dancer's artistic expression. In breaking down stigmas, myths and harmful tropes of ballet and disability, these performances give voice to and empower the dancers. Presenting as subjects with agency, as opposed to objects of a critical and ableist gaze, the dancers are seen, heard and understood in their performance.

Figure 41: We Dance Screenshot – Each dancer in his/her own spotlight (Mencap 2012)

At the end of the performance in the *We Dance* film, the scene returns to the space of the studio, showing the dancers in a formation, all facing the camera. One dancer is positioned in the front and center of the formation, smiling at and making eye contact with the camera. The dancers all appear to exhibit contented facial expressions, most notably, the central dancer wearing a proud smile. On the final note of the musical accompaniment, he lifts his arms into a welcoming, playful shrug that communicates "this is us", gesturing toward himself and the rest of the dancers (see Figure 44). This once again shows the dancers' intentional and willing self-display and self-representation, as well as their

positive experience within the studio space (and not merely within the stage space). When asked about the experience dance offers the dancers, they used the terms "happy" and "proud" to describe their feelings (Paul Harris 2012). According to Fisher (in Paul Harris 2012), the project was their Olympic moment". At the end of the *We Dance* film, the dancers' true expressions can clearly be seen. The enjoyment in their facial expressions and movements is unmistakable. This scene is a heart-warming self-display and communication of each dancer's identity and personality through dance. Moreover, these moments expose Freefall Dance Company's overwhelmingly positive engagement with the art of ballet, creating a secure space for the practice, enjoyment and performance of ballet. Importantly this provides a platform for the restoration of ballet and the inclusion and empowerment of bodies that are seen as abnormal.

Figure 42: We Dance Screenshot – This is us (Mencap 2012)

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter intended to critically consider the subjects of cognitive disability and ballet by exploring Freefall Dance Company firstly from a hermeneutic perspective and also, by analysing two of the company's performances, from a semiotic perspective. Multidimensionality regarding the body and ballet proved fundamental to the findings of the analyses. According to these findings, ballet can be seen as "an avenue for both

inclusion and empowerment" of individuals with disabilities (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:106). It offers both empowerment through action and through offering a platform to share one's voice or narrative external to the space of one's "immediate world" (Delgado & Humm-Delgado 2017:109). The films by Freefall Dance Company are powerful examples of artistic confrontation of stigmas, myths, stereotypes and harmful tropes that exclude individuals with difference. Sillito (in Paul Harris 2012) notes the power of ballet, stating that it "has unlocked skills, feelings, achievements, that other lessons could never reach".

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Concluding Remarks

By considering as key subjects the disfigured body, the disabled body and ballet, this dissertation intended to address the following research questions:

What is the importance and inclusive potential of a multidimensional perspective on 1) the disabled or disfigured body and 2) the art of ballet within the fields of performing arts and visual culture? The importance of this perspective is to regard all human beings in their completeness, as opposed to reducing them to visual or physical traits that also result in stereotypical perceptions and misconceptions which prove harmful, stigmatising and exclusionary. I specifically considered those bodies that, in spite of the efforts of inclusive discourse, often remain misunderstood and therefore left behind: the disabled body and the disfigured body. More specifically, in the analyses of this dissertation, I explored the personal lives and experiences of DePrince – a dancer with disfigurement – and Powell-Main – a dancer with physical disability. I also considered the representation and experience(s) of dancers with cognitive disabilities in analyses of Freefall Dance Company. These analyses, demonstrating the multidimensionality of body and ballet, uncovered multiple meanings of these subjects that may oppose dominant ideological designations and the subsequent detrimental consequences of disfigurement, disability and ballet.

How can a multidimensional perspective on body and dance, specifically ballet, challenge and change dominant representations and understandings of persons with disfigurement, physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities? A multidimensional perspective allows us to criticise, challenge and possibly break down the myths, stereotypes and superficial aspects of body and ballet. In turn this view allows for many hidden truths of and possibilities for both subjects to be realised. In realising the positive attributes and potentials of ballet for the disabled and/or disfigured body, a potential path was paved in this study for the restoration of these bodies from the stigmatising ideologies that serve to govern and remove all three subjects from society.

How can ballet, through this multidimensional perspective, be reimagined as an inclusive method of art that produces creativity and expression and, more importantly, facilitates social inclusion, destigmatisation and empowerment of persons with disfigurement, physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities? Considering those aspects and potentials of ballet that are almost always neglected in cultural studies and considering the personal experiences of individuals with disability and disfigurement who engage with ballet, such as DePrince, Powell-Main and the Freefall dancers, showed that ballet can be highly beneficial. My analyses demonstrated the capacity of ballet to be socially inclusive through its celebration of bodies that are otherwise seen as lesser, incapable and abnormal or aesthetically unacceptable. A consequent capacity of ballet considered in the analyses is its facilitation of empowerment through celebrating individuals in their authenticity and allowing them to self-express and tell their own personal stories through artistic movement. These findings support an optimistic perspective on ballet, demonstrating the possibility for the restoration of ballet in itself through the just mentioned processes that confirm its positive attributes, potentials and values.

In concluding this dissertation, I refer to Brenda Solomon (2007:100), who states that "caring takes thinking and thinking takes caring". Fudge Schormans (2011:383) remarks that the essence of such *care* must not be aimed at the "problem of disability", but rather at "people with disabilities". By taking into account the personal lived experiences of my subjects, this study assumed such a position to address stigmas, myths and inaccurate stereotypical portrayals of people with disabilities – similarly, also as with people with disfigurement – that label them "as frightening, different, unlovable and powerless" (Fudge Schormans 2011:381). Like Harter *et al* (2006:23), this dissertation attentively hears and listens to the voices of artists and explores the richness and fluidity of their art – art that is transformative, to say the least. Harter *et al* (2006:26) also recognise the deeper capacity of art, claiming that it "provides opportunities for social justice and change". The art of ballet as well as the disabled body and the disfigured body can benefit from these opportunities, liberating all three subjects from criticising, harmful ideologies and understandings. Ultimately, by formulating and undertaking a multidimensional perspective on the body and dance, both the understanding and the experience of a) disfigurement, b) disability and c) ballet can be restored.

5.2 Summary of Chapters

This dissertation was divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduced dominant understandings of ballet and body, specifically the so-called abnormal body. Chapter One also outlined the theoretical frameworks and research methodologies that were to be employed throughout the study. I laid out three principal research questions as driving force for and purpose of the analyses that followed. In this chapter I introduced the notion of dimensionality and also, briefly, my subjects that were to be analysed. Chapter Two served as an extensive literature review and exploration, considering the study's two recurring themes, namely body and ballet. In the first section of this chapter, I considered the body, looking into theories and understandings of the body, disfigurement and disability, specifically in the context of visual cultural studies. The second section of the literature discussion focused on ballet, considering themes of performance, representation, restoration and empowerment. Multidimensionality, largely based on the work of Grabher and Hanna, was critical to both sections. Chapter Three and Four took the shape of theoretical and visual analyses, building both on a hermeneutic and semiotic methodology. Chapter Three was concerned with the body/dancer and offers analyses of DePrince and Powell-Main, exploring their respective relationships with their bodies, identities and ballet. The focus throughout was on both dancers' personal experiences. Both disfigurement and physical disability were considered in Chapter Three. Chapter Four was concerned with the subject of ballet – or, the dance, as opposed to the dancer. This chapter presented hermeneutic and semiotic analyses of Freefall Dance Company, taking into account cognitive disabilities. Chapter Four's focus, while still regarding the body, was largely concerned with ballet – more specifically, the positive impact and potential of ballet on the lives of those who are otherwise marginalised, stigmatised, *othered* and excluded in society. Chapter Three and Four both served to demonstrate a possible means of overcoming these negative effects on disfigurement and disability – and of the ballet world itself – through bodies and institutions that challenge and change dominant ideologies.

5.3 Contribution of Study

The purpose of this study was to formulate a new perspective on disfigured and disabled bodies and ballet in order to pave a possible route towards destigmatisation, social

inclusion and empowerment. This perspective involves the element of multidimensionality and intends to consider both body and ballet beyond the surface – in other words, beyond a physical, literal and visual realm. A thorough understanding of the body and of ballet, I argue, relies on a multidimensional approach, considering those aspects that are often disregarded in various fields of study, including visual cultural studies. The analyses and applied literature in this dissertation have proven that performing art can improve self-esteem, reinforce social unity and inclusion, and speak to problematic social matters (Collins *et al* 2022:308). Ballet, as a performing art, can provide opportunities to encourage participation and inspire social understanding (Collins *et al* 2022:309). However, several barriers and a lack of consideration inhibit the occurrence and result of these possibilities (Collins *et al* 2022:309).

The atypical body has been shown to disrupt commonplace actions by dislocating perception, sensation and observation. The owner of this body is reduced to his/her atypicality in that it becomes highly visible and attracts unwanted attention – in MacGregor's (in Frances 2012:114) terms, this body fails to exist normally and is therefore denied "civil inattention". The result of this is the disregard of such an individual as invalid, other and even a non-person or abject, unworthy of inclusion and equality (Cahill & Eggleston 2005:684-686). Ballet falls victim to a similar condescendence and criticism, deemed by dominant and traditional ideologies as incapable of generating inclusive pleasure, social unity, self-confidence and self-expression. Scholars such as Hanna (1995), Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012), Clark (2018), Aujla and Redding (2013; 2014; 2021) are among the few who defend the art of ballet against a largely disapproving perspective thereof. As pointed out by Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012:112), "defences of ballet are disproportionately under-represented in comparison with its criticism". Although there have been significant advancements in the world of dance to include and empower persons with disfigurement and disability, the topic has not received nearly as much consideration in the academic field. The genre of ballet, in particular, as associated with disability and disfigurement, has remained nearly untouched in the (cultural) academic field. In an attempt to address this matter, building on these scholars' proposition for alternative approaches to the interpretation and understanding of ballet, this dissertation sought to explore the ways in which ballet is inclusive of persons with

disfigurement and disability and, in turn, can be considered an inclusive method of art that allows for destigmatisation and empowerment, fuelled by creativity and self-expression (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou 2012:113-115).

Recognising the deficiency in restorative research on the subjects, this dissertation intended to broaden an affirmative and compassionate view on persons with disfigurement and disabilities, as well as ballet itself. In demonstrating a different perspective on body and ballet, I sought to establish a possible means for restoring social perceptions and experiences of disability and disfigurement, specifically in the field of performing arts. This dissertation therefore contributes to a disability discourse that seeks to validate, include and affirm those with difference. My focus on three overarching themes of such difference, namely disfigurement, physical disability and cognitive disability, is intentional and by including these individuals in my study, I hope to open the path towards restoration not merely for the one, or the other, but for all persons whose atypicality – regardless of the cause, the nature or the effects thereof – has come to define them through biased, ableist and aesthetic driven ideological lenses. Moreover, this dissertation contributes not merely to those studies that regard the body in social and cultural contexts, but also to the study of dance, performance and art. Constructing a multidimensional perspective on body and dance, this study sought after destigmatisation, social inclusion and empowerment, by considering both subjects in a light that does not reduce or mistake them, but instead celebrates them.

The topic of disfigurement, disability and ballet, which I specifically and explicitly intended to explore in this dissertation, reveals the lack of critical consideration of these subjects. On an international scale, there has been some level of consideration of disfigurement, disability and ballet. However, in the South African context, these subjects (taken together) are entirely absent from the academic field, and possibly also from the social and public field. Major developmental and inclusive gaps, both in theory and in the dance studio, both locally and internationally, are exposed through critical cultural exploration of disfigurement, disability and ballet.

5.4 Limitations of Study

This study considers only a handful of dancers with disfigurement and disability, as well as an in depth consideration of one inclusive and integrated dance company. Moreover, while the context of the study can freely apply to the South African culture, my subjects are located in western countries. Although DePrince is a woman of colour, originally from Africa, the larger part of her life story takes place in America. Ethnic and cultural differences may be of significance in producing a faultless investigation of the experience of ballet and bodily difference in a social and artistic space. My motivation behind choosing international subjects as focus of my case studies lies in the absence of any known engagement of ballet with disability and disfigurement in a South African context. The lack of representations of disability and disfigurement in ballet in South Africa also implies a lack of visual material on these subjects. Subsequently, for the purpose of my semiotic analyses, I selected dancers and companies that associate with freely available visual content on social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook. Furthermore, due to my reliance of secondary sources, this dissertation's case studies are confined to certain cultures and a certain age group.

This dissertation's focus specifically on involuntary bodily difference, as well as on three specific bodily conditions – disfigurement, physical disability and cognitive disability – also narrows the framework of inclusion in the performing arts. However, the multidimensional framework formulated in this study, I believe, can be applied – at least to different extents – to include other aspects and groups that are stigmatised, discriminated against and excluded. These aspects may include gender, sex, social class, race and ethnicity.

The idea of engaging in art as a form of therapy has started to change, in that persons with difference are now demonstrating their capabilities and strengths in pursuing artistic careers (Collins *et al* 2021:320). However, these undertakings remain largely disregarded. As Collins *et al* (2021:320) put it: "past mistakes are repeated and used as an excuse for present shortcomings". Grasping the multidimensionality of dance, Inal (2014:32) insists that therapeutic dancing facilitates self-expression and improves body image. Engaging in dance in this manner serves to nurture and "maintain psychological well-being" (Inal

2014:32). Whereas this study specifically focused on the professional context of ballet, it has been noted in Chapter Two that therapeutic and recreational contexts of ballet are not to be overlooked and prove beneficial in their own right. This dissertation considers subjects that have become well-known on an international scale and are now prominent in the world of dance. Investigating dancers (bodies and conditions) and companies (spaces and contexts) that are not as major or well-known may be of equal importance in confirming the success of a multidimensional perspective on body and ballet.

The analyses of this study consider the personal lives of two individuals. However, the information has largely been obtained from secondary sources as opposed to personal interviews, visits or observations. Seeing that the subjects of my case studies are based internationally, personal interviews and observations were not viable and fell beyond the scope of this dissertation. Such endeavours, however, can aid in strengthening the impact and potential of this dissertation's objective in restoring the disfigured body, the disabled body and the art of ballet by personally observing and engaging with the subjects.

Lastly, while I may be criticised for my perceived ignorance towards the possible negative aspects that may indeed arise from the practice of and engagement with ballet, I want to stress that my employment of information on and perspectives of certain ballet scholars, choreographers, companies and dancers does not intend to take the ideological or political stance of any of them. Rather, I endeavoured to strip ballet bare from those ideologies and constructed principles. I sought to consider the art of ballet, as opposed to considering the dominant, politically charged organisation of ballet. I sought to consider the ways in which certain scholars or choreographers reveal the beauty and benefit of ballet, as opposed to considering the political opinions or beliefs of these persons. It is important to consider that those aspects that deem ballet exclusive, for instance the twentieth century's aesthetic myths, stereotypes and expectations of the ballerina and the ballerina's body, do not come to define the art of ballet, but instead speak to society in the greater context.

As discussed above, taking into account other aspects that result in the exclusion and marginalisation of individuals or groups is important to fully comprehend the lived

experiences of those individuals both in the dance world and in society in general. Whereas my focus was on the dancer and the dance institution, the actual stage productions of dances or Ballets and performance elements were analysed mainly from a semiotic point of view. Various Ballets, from traditional productions to contemporary productions can also aid in the hermeneutic analysis of representation, inclusion and experience(s).

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

As Collins *et al* (2021:323) suggest, future research of the subjects of this dissertation "needs to address ways to overcome barriers that relate to the four-dimensional approach to social inclusion" of persons with disfigurement and disability in ballet. Frameworks that exceed the scope of cultural studies may prove beneficial to the endeavour of destigmatising, including and empowering individuals with disfigurement and disability, as well as determining the values that ballet holds for such individuals in their multidimensionality. For example, within the field of psychology, the value and effect of therapeutic dance can be efficiently explored. Taking into account performance art or dance as a deliberate means of activism and provocation may also lead to restorative findings and conclusions both on the body and on ballet. Genres of dance that fall outside of ballet as well as consideration of ballet in different social groups and cultural settings may prove significant to an extensive and wide-ranging conclusion on the questions posed and findings determined in this dissertation.

Another limitation to take into account is the problem of generalisation. In order to produce effective analyses, generalised theories have been made to enhance a multidimensional understanding of my subjects (Collins *et al* 2021:323). Considering the non-professional or non-competitive environment of ballet may be relevant, if not necessary, to create an extensive understanding of the impact of ballet and the personal experience of individuals with disfigurement and disability. There are indeed many inclusive and integrated dance organisations – even in a South African context, such as Durban-based Flatfoot Dance Company's workshops for dancers with disabilities, and Chaeli Sports & Recreational Club's integrated ballroom and Latin American dance programme.

South Africa's engagement with disabilities in dance may open up various possibilities and opportunities for future research. Examples of companies, festivals and projects that represent such engagement, include Unmute Dance Company (briefly mentioned in Chapter Two) and the endeavours of Flatfoot – Flatfoot Downie Dance Company, Flatfoot Wheelchair Dance Programme and Flatfoot Ability Festival, all from Durban. While these companies and projects do not specifically relate to the genre of ballet, they do indeed indicate a significant awareness of and engagement with persons with disabilities. I believe that critical consideration of dance beyond the style of ballet (such as the mentioned companies and projects) could yield remarkable results in social, cultural and political undertakings that intend to destigmatise, include and empower persons with bodily difference, especially in the South African context.

Considering various groups that engage with ballet, such as mature, adult or elderly individuals, may be useful, if not necessary, to evade such possible generalisations. Some of the scholars that I have made reference to in this study touched on these groups, however, it was beyond the scope of this study to explore the effects of a multidimensional framework on them in the space of dance. Subsequently, and in the same sense, I have noted that the recreational environment of ballet need also be considered in order to establish a detailed, in-depth and sound conclusion on the themes of 1) restoring ballet and 2) destigmatising, including and empowering individuals with bodily difference.

In addition to the abovementioned factors to take into consideration, various social, cultural, political and religious contexts play a significant part in the outcome of restorative endeavours that regard disfigurement, disability and ballet. Exploring, for example, differences and similarities in understandings, representations, perceptions and experiences of individuals with disfigurement and disability in the global north and south, may lead to critical findings. Moreover, delving into religious, political and cultural beliefs regarding bodily difference and dance may evidence fascinating topics of discussion. Such consideration will allow for numerous frameworks to connect and intersect, in turn providing an all-encompassing lens through which disfigurement, disability and ballet can be viewed – a lens armoured with understanding, compassion

and a collective intention to defy oppressive ideologies, social exclusion and discrimination, harmful perceptions and representations, and consequences that impact the personal lives and experiences of the individuals in question. There is indeed, as Collins *et al* (2021:321) point out, a long way ahead in the process of including all through representation. Lastly, engaging with subjects through personal interviews and conversations is key to the purpose and value of such a framework.

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