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Micro-Bodily Mobilities: Choreographing a geographies and mobilities of dance and disability

Abstract

This paper examines the mobile and embodied geographies of four abled-bodied dancers following their artistic encounters with disability in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Uniquely, I work with the dancing body to examine the differentiated experiences of mobility, and to uncover the performative role of the able body in unravelling assumptions around the skills and artistry of disability dance. Empirical research developed in response to a choreographic [dialogue](#) held between the dance company BalletBoyz, and the disabled dancers of Ethiopia's Adugna Potentials. Post-artistic exchange interviews and performance-based observations with the BalletBoyz are mobilised here to advance geographical knowledge about the embodied, performative and practiced dimensions of micro-bodily mobility. Equally, I assert the creative [potential](#) of the dancing body to probe the social construction of imperfect mobility by [exceeding](#) an *ablest* mobile experience, and *inverting* expectations around bodily disability.

Keywords

[Creativity](#), dance, disability, embodiment, geographies of mobility, mobile methods

Introduction

'Mobility is practiced, it is experienced, it is embodied' (Cresswell 2006, 3).

In the ten years since Hannam et al.'s (2006) first editorial, the sub-field of mobilities has evolved into a lively arena of geographical enquiry. Contributions from across migration, transport, economic, and cultural geography have included studies into the macro-level movement of people and objects, alongside mounting attention into everyday human mobilities (see Blunt, 2007; Cresswell 2001; Hannam 2008; Lorimer 2011; Merriman 2009). By attending to where, when, and how much people move, human geographers have uncovered the power relations underpinning mobility (Cresswell 2010). They have also stressed that mobility is not a universal benefit, but, a highly differentiated activity, shaped by hierarchies of power by race, age, class, and ability (Imrie and Edwards 2007).

Others contribute to these discussions by examining how inequalities in individual lived experiences of mobility reflect underlying moral geographies, which mark out 'correct' bodily rhythms from 'inappropriate' movement forms. In one respect, this process of representation provides the mechanisms through which socio-political systems are able to assess 'inappropriate' micro-bodily mobilities (Adey 2007). Yet demonising illicit mobilities can also help solidify a normalising vision of the mobile body; namely male, white, elite, and able (see Imrie 2000; Wilkie 2012). Failure to adhere to socially correct ways of moving can, as a result, materially

impact on those labelled as abnormal through everyday practices of othering or broader socio-spatial forms of exclusion (Creswell 2001; see Hall 2013). Geographers have made significant strides in accounting for those lived inequalities resulting from imperfect mobility. However, they have not been so good at examining critically the *multiple* material, fleshy dimensions of human movement. So to, while disability geographers have stressed that mobility cannot be taken as a given, the mobilities field has been slow to examine how [the prevailing Western](#) discourse of the 'perfect' mobile body might be [problematized](#) (see Imrie 2012; Gaete-Reyes 2015 for notable exceptions). Responding to such criticism is therefore timely as 'othered' bodies, including the disabled body, remain largely absent from recent thinking on mobility (Imrie and Edwards 2007).

In this paper, I [examine](#) how [geography's](#) performative turn offers an innovative approach to thinking about micro-bodily mobilities as they are embodied, performed and practiced. Equally, I argue that through mixed-ability dance practice, the 'perfect' able body, analogous with Western theatrical landscapes ([classical, lyrical, and modern dance](#)), might be creatively contested. Specifically, I am interested in a dance exchange entitled *Lost in Perfection* (see BalletBoyz 2011 for a video clip), created between the professional dance company BalletBoyz and the self-defined disabled Adugna Potentials of Addis Ababa. These reflections emerged through interviews with BalletBoyz in London 2012, alongside videographic observations of contact improvisation workshops. The decision to focus exclusively on the experiences of the Boyz, coupled with limited access to the

Potentials, [does](#) raise noteworthy concerns around who speaks, or is spoken for. [Nevertheless](#), I argue there remains important space to think critically about how creative encounters *with* disability [might invite](#) *non-disabled* collaborators to play a valuable role in transforming their own, and wider, stereotypes around human movement.

In pursuit of this aim, the paper is divided into four sections. The first discusses recent conceptual developments on micro-bodily mobilities through the emerging geographies of dance literature. The second outlines the experimental dance-based methodology adopted in the wake of geography's turn toward mobile methods. [Third](#), I [outline](#) the research project, and examine how [an](#) able body experience exposed the limitations of *ablest* modes of movement and, [with varying success](#), *inverted* socio-culturally specific assumptions of mobility. I [conclude by arguing that](#) dance mobilities provide richly performative insight into what different bodies are perceived capable (or not) to [do, and through](#) a [geographies](#) of dance, [we might artistically problematise](#) the social construction of the 'imperfect' body.

Towards a mobilities of dance

Over the last decade, the mobile body has become a popular figure within human geographical scholarship (Adey et al. 2014; Cresswell and Merriman 2011). Among transport geographers there has been renewed interest in the embodied qualities of journeying (Merriman 2009), while political geographers have uncovered the

relationship between surveillance and bodily rhythms (Adey 2007). Critical engagement with everyday mobilities has largely been driven by calls to take seriously the multiple scales and practices of movement. Cultural geographers have, most notably, drawn upon their interest in performance to advance enquiries into human mobilities. Cresswell's 2006 study of ballroom dance remains particularly influential, and offers (at least) three useful concepts for thinking critically about the politics of dancing bodies.

As with human mobility, dance mobilities circulate within social, cultural, and geographical worlds, in which various forms of power are at play. What this suggests for Cresswell is that while the moving body operates as a form of meaning making in the production of socio-cultural norms, it can also express established 'normative ideals' (2006, 58). To exemplify, ballet incorporated 'movement of immobility – poses and rests – that specifically signified the (feminine) virtue of respectability' (Hanna 1988, 166). Body regimes like dance therefore *(re)perform* normative ideals about human mobility, be that around gender or ability. Connected, since inception in the 1900s, ballroom steps were subjected to various strategies of regulation. By identifying those used to discipline the sexually 'suggestive' tango, Cresswell effectively hinted toward the political power afforded to the moving body. 'Illicit' dance mobilities can therefore be understood as harbouring significant agency in their ability to transgress socio-cultural ideologies of 'correct' ways of moving (Nash 2000). Amongst which is a capacity to artistically subvert hegemonic bodily

discourses or undermine – *through that body*– existing normative values (Midgelow 2007).

Finally, wider efforts to regulate the dancing body have been situated within a much longer imaginative geography that regulated the boundaries between respectable and illicit mobility. European colonial authorities most explicitly sought to prohibit sexually liberal indigenous dance forms (Ballantyne and Burton 2009), or render them subordinate through the colonial dichotomy. Black, 'primitive', and 'degenerative' were, accordingly, positioned in direct opposition to the superior white, 'civilised', uniform dance forms characteristic of European culture. Underpinned by this moral imaginary, and cemented through a propensity toward objectifying the 19th Century ballerina, the contemporary Western dance scene has reserved the title dancer to a highly specific dancing body. Indeed, despite 150 years of societal change, the idealised image of the symmetrical, lean, white, able-bodied, ballerina still subtly informs society's vision of the professional dancer (Thomas 2003). Slower or messier forms of embodied mobility, *by contrast, continue to occupy marginal spaces*, and those individual's embodying such moves *remain* branded as passive victims.

Coupled with this romanticised image of the dancing body has been a *sustained* process of silencing. Performance scholars have been particularly criticised for ignoring 'other' embodied mobilities such as the refugee or vagrant through their proclivity toward ablest mobile *figures* (Wilkie 2012). The effect has been to consolidate, and even stage, dichotomous bodies, such as fit-frail, perfect-

imperfect, and augment an embodied discourse which reserves symmetrical, unassisted movement to the superior classification of aesthetic quality (Albright 1997). Turning to the geographies of disability, Imrie similarly notes, the mobile body is traditionally 'conceived of in terms of independence of movement and bodily functions; a body without physical and mental impairments' (2000, 1643). The consequence of which has been to mark out 'less than perfect' bodies as disrupting the dominant societal view of 'normal' (Oliver 1996).

Advocates of disability dance have, *consequentially*, argued that staging mobile difference can enact a form of bodily defiance, rupturing the territories between malformed and whole, beautiful and grotesque, and destabilise the aesthetic values intrinsic within normative definitions of the body (Midgelow 2007). The intention in doing so is not to encourage audiences to 'see beyond' disability, but, crucially, to reflect critically on the *social construction* of disability (Dear et al. 1997). While the turn to performance has encouraged *some* to experiment with practice-based methods to explore micro-bodily difference (see Gaete-Reyes 2015; Macpherson 2009), the challenge remains, how to reclaim a space that might sit somewhere between the invisibility of the disabled body and the hypervisibility of disability as 'other' (Kuppers 2004).

In response, this paper advances Cresswell's calls for an *embodied* and *practiced* account of mobilities through an examination of the body regimes, choreographic dialogues, and movement aesthetics of BalletBoyz during their encounters with *disability*. It is not the intention of this paper to deny the autonomy

of the [Potentials](#) in determining his/her own self-determination, [nor ignore wider relationships of power across race and class](#). What I do suggest, however, is that the collaborative practice positioned the able [dancer](#) as equally accountable for [unravelling the](#) normalised bodily 'truths' discussed above. I therefore ask, how might dance-based experimentation, as both method and practice, expand possibilities for thinking through the relation between movement and disability?

Methods on the move: Dancing disability

[With the emergence of new theories of mobility, there has been](#) a substantial growth in mobile methods. Unlike their sedentary counterparts, mobile methods are argued to offer the researcher greater insight into the embodied experiences of mobile research subjects (see Lorimer 2011; Merriman 2014; Spinney 2011). [Without wishing to overstate](#) their relative merits, I propose that there is considerable potential for methods that *move* with bodies, and prioritise the multi-sensory, [kinaesthetic](#) aspects of human movement. [Bodies, after all, sense and make sense of the world 'as they move bodily in and through it'](#) (Büscher et al. 2011, 6). Contact improvisation (CI) is therefore introduced as a creative method for researching mobilities on the move.

['Contact' as a concept has endured as a central motif within geographical scholarship, yet](#) as a [method](#) of dance experimentation, CI surfaced in the 1960s amongst postmodern dancers Steve Paxton and Anna Halprin. Unlike its ballet

predecessor, CI rejects the 'ideal' body in favour of movement dialogues and diverse bodily shapes (Kuppers, 2004). Here, emphasis is placed upon a playful exploration of the possibilities and mechanics of bodies coming together. True, CI operates according to core 'fundamentals', including rolling point of contact (bodies touch at one point), weight exchange, and basic lift vocabulary. However, there is a sense that anyone can practice CI, whether professional or untrained, abled or crucially, disabled (*ibid*). After all, Paxton's vision was not conceived to bring disability into dance, but rather to 'disable conventional notions of the body' (Davies 2010, 44). Essentially, this included challenging definitions of acceptable dancing bodies, but also fashioning a movement discourse that echoed certain experiences of physical disability. Multiple balancing points, for example, foster new ways of looking at dancing bodies by crafting physical (challenging the upright facing) and aesthetic disorientation (*ibid*). As mobile method, CI might thus pave the way for richly tactile, less hierarchical exchanges about the experiential qualities of bodily encounters. It might also enrich mobile discourse around how various kinds of 'moves' fashion social realities.

The empirical research presented here is drawn from three weeks of CI workshops held between BalletBoyz and the Potentials in Kebele Studio Addis Ababa. I build upon a documentary of this exchange (BalletBoyz 2011), alongside behind-the-scene footage, a dancer's personal journal, and six post-performance interviews (with Ed, Matt, and Taylor, BalletBoyz's executive director Kerry, and Aduigna's and Dance United's artistic directors, Addisu Demissie and Andrew

Coggins). These interviews recount experiences working with the Potentials, and the creation of *Lost in Perfection*. Research findings were more broadly informed by three weeks of performance ethnography conducted in London 2012 with BalletBoyz and Demissie; comprising of observation and participation in technique [training](#), CI, and the choreographing of a disability-themed piece entitled *Stepback*.

Founded in 2001, BalletBoyz are an all-male, London-based professional dance company engaging in an innovative blend of contemporary ballet. Adugna Community Dance Theatre's history by contrast can be traced to a UK-backed arts-led development project created ten years after the Ethiopian famine. Headed by cultural activist Andrew Coggins, the 1996 project saw over 100 street children, come together in an intensive Western dance training process, climaxing in a performance of *Carmina Burana*. Following its success, Ethiopia's only Contemporary dance company, Adugna, was born. For artistic directors and former participants of this project, Addisu Demissie and Junaid Jamal Sendi, Adugna have a subsequent debt of social responsibility to give back to the local community (Plastow 2004).

Part of this ethical mission has [involved artistic co-creation with](#) Addis' disabled youth. Across Ethiopia, disabling factors such as infectious diseases, civil strife, and an absence of primary preventative services 'has brought a phenomenal increase in the incidence of disability' (Teferra 2005, 1). Estimates of those affected range from some 800 thousand individuals to 14.4 million (WHO 2011). Inconsistency in reporting can largely be accredited to the socio-culturally embedded suspicion attached to disabilities in the country. Fear and shame leads many family members

to conceal those individuals from public gatherings, or, abandon them to a life on the streets. Initiated in 2000, the Potentials consist of ten individuals whom suffer from post-polio paralysis and one with severe cerebral palsy. All are orphans or former street children of Addis, and thus occupy a complex space on the margins of mainstream society. Since inception, the Potentials have used choreographies including *Fragments of my Life*, to expose the social construction of disability in Ethiopia, test the boundaries of the disabled body, and raise awareness about their daily experiences of socio-spatial exclusion (Plastow 2004). In the remainder of this paper, I explore how the company's socio-political agenda developed during choreographic encounters with the BalletBoyz, and how the Boyz's expectations of the disabled body were artistically subverted in *Lost in Perfection*.

Choreographing mobilities on the move: *Lost in Perfection*

Occupying downstage right, 14 dancers wearing blue tie-dye t-shirts slowly rise to their knees, extending their left arm, twisted and angular, defensively over their crooked heads. Their bodies convulse frenziedly as a simplistic rhythmic drumming intensifies. Clumped together into one compact unit, they begin to push one another across the stage floor with their arms, legs, heads and backs.

Lost in Perfection, choreographed by Demissie, and performed by four BalletBoyz in conjunction with the Potentials at City Hall, Addis Ababa on the 19th October 2011,

takes disability and the stigmatisation attached to imperfect mobility in Ethiopia as its choreographic theme. The movement motifs and aesthetic style materialised during a series of highly experimental CI classes between the two companies. As a socio-politically reflexive choreography, *Lost* thus enacts *disability in the arts* by integrating disabled dancers and their movements into the creation process. It also, and equally, embodies *disabled art* in that it explores disability through an activist agenda with the aim of promoting the concerns of the disabled (Sandahl and Auslander 2008). Among the Potentials, concerns ranged from experiences of mundane shunning, through to physical violence, sexual exploitation, and theft (Benjamin 2013). Public performances across the city have been one way the company has sought to engage audiences into thinking about disability, and to [creatively generate messages, which counteract those of the mainstream](#). Demissie explains, 'there is a lot of negative attitude about disability. We try to change that through dance'.

I am therefore interested in how CI might facilitate a form of body-based dialogue about the differentiated experiences of mobility. I suggest that BalletBoyz's experience co-producing *Lost* unravels the politics of micro-bodily mobilities in two specific ways. First, CI exchanges exceeded [the Boyz's ablest](#) mobile experience. Second, these bodily-rich dialogues [went some way toward inverting their classical dance](#) association of physical ability with superior athleticism.

i.) Beyond ablest dance mobilities

From the outset of the mixed-ability CI, there was a very deliberate attempt to choreograph *across* bodily difference and to embody the 'diverse' micro-bodily forms present within the studio (see Albright 1997). Essentially, this involved integrating differently mobile bodies within the dance space. Emphasis was placed on mutual participation, necessitating the BalletBoyz practice their craft *alongside* the Potentials. BalletBoyz were equally encouraged to broaden their ablest tempos and rhythms through a process of embodied sharing (imitation, experimenting), and dismantle an image of the dancing physique as 'independently' mobile (Imrie 2000). Rather than reinforcing discourses of inability, CI also promoted the crafting of movement relationships, demanding the Boyz recognise that *all* bodies are differently mobile.

Without introducing the specificities of each of the dancers physical abilities, all participants were brought together in a floor work exercise. Manipulating, guiding, and engaging in pushes of connectivity, the group undertook to initiate movement in one another, through a series of rolls and reaches, from one edge of the studio floor to the other. Movements required sustained embodied and emotional contact with limbs, hands, *flesh, and metal*. Intimate exchanges of touch were central for Demissie to expose the BalletBoyz's *varying preconceptions* of physical difference and create an environment conducive to working *with* bodily difference (see Kitchin 1998; Hall 2010).

Taylor: 'They didn't sit us down and say this guy has a metal leg, this guy can't move his arms.

(Demissie said) right everyone on the floor. We want you to roll around on each other.

And, it didn't matter what was wrong. We initiated movement in each other.'

Kerry: 'One of those exercises was to remove any differences. The exercises were on the floor,

so that everybody, regardless of their ability, was able to literally be on the same level.'

From Kerry's perspective, the floor work activity operated metaphorically by provoking dialogue around notions of levels, understood both in terms of professionalism and varying degrees of assisted mobility. So too, and in following Davies (2010), practicing floor-bound movement practically dis-abled the able-bodied studio encounter. For Taylor, participating on an equal level was about experimenting with the restrictive roles of 'supporter-supported', and finding 'mutual ground with someone a whole different world away'. Having danced with disability before, Taylor's reflections indicate an effort to push against hegemonic dance ideals of assertory, vertical mobility, but, more critically, to reconceptualise the disenfranchised street child as requiring his 'support'. Indeed, success in achieving the shared dance aim (reaching the adjacent wall) depended upon mixed-ability cooperation. For Ed this involved 'pulling' and 'grabbing', symptomatic of some degree of bodily authority, but it also comprised of being propelled forward by those less disabled, through 'swinging' and 'flinging' mobilities.

Coproduction of floor movement was particularly important when dancing with one heavily disabled female dancer, Araf. Despite being unable to walk, travelling instead on clenched fists and knees, Araf features as a prominent figure in the working practice of the group, moulding in response to external influences. Demissie explains, 'Araf, she has very limited movements. We want her to be in the group so we push her'. Viewed in this light, Araf is exclusively 'moved' by external, more physically capable abled and disabled dancers. Yet this relationship of power was, in Taylor's eyes, choreographically subverted as the group came to respond to muscular impulses originating from Araf.

Intense bodily connectivity during this shared embodied task also led the BalletBoyz to widen their bodily regimes and exceed the restrictions of classical techniques. This emphasised exploring the different qualities of the disabled dancers' movement vocabulary, and focusing upon, as Ed describes, 'what someone can do rather than what they can't'. In one poignant example, the inability of one Potential to contract his knee due to the restrictions of a leg brace led the pair to experiment with a lateral rocking stepping motion (BalletBoyz 2011). Not only did this offer a less symmetrical quality and offbeat rhythm to Ed's movement, but also crafted a fleeting movement sequence in which the mechanics necessary for walking in unison were negotiated through disabled assistance (Albright, 1997). Extending upon Hall (2013), we could therefore conceptualise CI as a 'safe haven' through which individuals might negotiate their micro-bodily differences.

ii.) Inverting dance mobilities

Although the creative process supported the dancers in [subverting](#) an ablest dance mobility, the movement dialogues cultivated also went one step further to *invert* the labels of abled or disabled mobility. Assumptions – both within [the Ethiopian mainstream](#) and prevalent across Western performance landscape (see Albright 1997) – around technical capacities and creative skills of the dancing body were, in particular, subjected to productive interrogation. Through a variety of duets, the [able-bodied](#) professional dancer was reworked into someone who was unable to replicate the technique and aesthetic quality of the disabled, semi-professional Ethiopian dancer.

This inverted relationship of embodied mobility was poignantly realised when each of the BalletBoyz were paired with a Potential. Instructed to replicate the movement vocabulary of their 'disabled' partner, the Boyz soon became confronted with the difficulties of recreating [their aesthetic quality or movement choice](#) when they detached a limb or extended a stretch beyond a highly-abled dancer's flexibility. The result was [to, momentarily,](#) invert the lens on how we interpret the 'othered' body as less-than-able. As Matt quickly realised, the bodily repercussions of living with polio resulted in his partner having 'no muscles or ligaments', but legs formed of solid metal, which he could detach at will;

Matt: 'You had to copy *their* movement and my guy had leg braces where he could sit in past second. (...) He just chucked his legs round and I had to copy that. Ridiculous! He just started really laughing at me!'

In an artistic realm where the boundaries of physicality remain **contested**, Matt's experiences demonstrate the limitations of the able body, and by contrast, the opportunities that arise through disability; in this case sitting beyond second (i.e. legs at 180⁰). Matt's embodied experiences furthermore represented a deconstruction of an institutionalised system of professional training, whereby 'mocking' was reversed onto the able dancer in a competitive exchange of technical ability. In contrast to perceiving disability as less physically **demanding**, Anthony also identified **his surprise at** the athleticism required; 'you were using all of your muscles'. **In the creative setting of the studio**, an alignment of disability with incapacity was therefore problematised via its ability to exceed the strength and flexibility of mobile professional dancers.

The incorporation of a physically demanding disabled dance technique was later rendered visible through a series of intricately connected lifts and supports that synchronously merged all performers during *Lost*. Taylor in particular experimented extensively with less ablest methods of pushing a wheelchair, including mobilising **his shoulders** and head to initiate motion. **Araf's bodily autonomy may, once again, be questioned**. However, through her wheelchair, she was able to carve out a niche space in which to counterbalance bodies, providing

her with a sense of validity in her presence on stage as artist (Benjamin 2013). In such contexts, the boundaries between mobility and disability productively intersect and blur. Experimenting with the supporter-supported relationship toward the end of the choreography similarly enabled the mixed abilities group to invert the abled-body relationships of contact work founded upon binaries of strength-dependency.

Insert Figure 1

Observing figure 1, what is perhaps more notable, is that the shapes and qualities of movement generated for *Lost* could not have been achieved without the use of wheelchairs and crutches. Amongst which were hyper-mobile expansive jumps and lifts, alongside counter-balances with mobility aids. One impressionable moment saw Anthony lifting the legs of a Potential over his right shoulder. She, by extension, engaged her upper body strength to balance on outstretched crutches, creating a hyper-elevated artistic form, beyond the ability of Anthony. Mobility assisting technologies thus came to operate as constitutive parts of the body and facilitated independence of movement (Gaete-Reyes 2015). Perhaps more significantly, they also contradicted the ability of Imrie's (2000) 'mobile body' to be independent.

Dancing difference

The richly embodied relationships [choreographed](#) during this three-week exchange were, most simply, concerned with anatomically and artistically [experimenting with](#) physical [difference](#). Co-producing mixed-ability dance, [in this way](#), demonstrated the self-determination of disabled individuals in shaping their own bodies [as creative subjects](#). Yet, it also highlighted how disability can be *performed* by the able body, with valuable aesthetic, artistic and, arguably, socio-political implications. Viewed in this light, dance-based experimentation might therefore perform a more significant methodological role as a mechanism through which we interrogate preconceived expectations about the social markers of bodies. Ed [notes how the act of dancing with difference helped him rupture his preconceptions of disability 'physically and mentally'](#). Yet [Lost](#) equally hints at the wider socio-political potential of performance. Staged to an audience of 900, [the choreography testifies](#) to the physical and artistic skills of [the disabled](#), which brings to the fore opportunities to think about the types of spaces conducive to fostering inclusion. Kerry explains 'there were people sitting in the isles and there was a real upsurge in terms of recognition' of what they had achieved, not as disabled street children, but as highly capable dancers. I therefore echo Hall in arguing, 'as people interact, emotions, bodies, and creativity cross boundaries, getting through to blur distinctions between (...) excluded and included positions' (2013, 246).

[Yet a note of caution is perhaps wise, for the choreographic dialogue circulated within a complex social geography. Indeed for Kerry and the BalletBoyz's artistic director, the creative process was as much about upstaging notions of](#)

physical difference as it was about confronting images of the Western company 'enabling' a disenfranchised dance community. There is, more significantly, a danger of fetishizing the degree of creative coproduction. Kerry for one observed how the 'internal politics' surrounding Aduigna's historical formation had led to 'resentment' among some. In practice, for Matt this meant there was 'a kind of conflict', with one or two Aduigna dancers 'shrugging' off the encounter. What this hints toward is the discursive repertoire in which moving bodies operate, for while some hierarchies were creatively destabilised, others remained.

To conclude, *Lost in Perfection* was crafted in-between dualisms of abled or disabled mobilities, and by contrast, emphasised an exploration of difference. The encounter explored how different types of bodies can move and support one another, be that as an able dancer or with wheelchairs and crutches. Detangling ablest dance mobilities and inverting expectations around the disabled body demanded the BalletBoyz recognise the Potentials not as disabled, but as artistic creators, capable of physically demanding and aesthetically innovative choreography. Such recognition could have significant impact on the Potentials by affirming what they are capable of achieving, but also, might disrupt societal prejudice around what is deemed 'out of place' (Hall 2013).

In the opening sections of this paper I argued that despite a new mobilities paradigm (Hannam et al. 2006) and a growth in mobile methods, the embodied, performed, and practiced dimensions of human movement had yet to be fully realised. In response, I worked critically and creatively with a mixed-ability dance

collaboration to uncover the micro-bodily mobilities of dancing bodies. Out of this rich empirical research, two notable contributions [are identified](#).

First, this paper advanced the geographies of mobility literature by prioritising the richly practiced and highly performative qualities of human movement. [It](#) took seriously the body regimes, choreographic dialogues and movement aesthetics of the BalletBoyz during their encounters with disability and explored how movement is always practiced *differently*. I therefore demonstrated the possibility of a richly embodied, dance-based methodology for working *with* micro-bodily difference, and for opening opportunities to explore how the relationship between movement and disability might be performed differently. Second, the paper outlined the limitations of the ablest experience so as to challenge an aesthetics of movement and to further probe the considerable absence of 'othered' bodies from Western [performance](#) landscapes. Rather than approaching the movement qualities of the Potentials as undesirable, the CI inscribed their choreography onto the Boyz, positioning the Potentials as valuable creators of art. *Lost in Perfection* thus sits alongside a growing body of scholarship that [unsettles](#) an imaginary of the dancing body as lean and able (see Thomas 2003). It also seeks to re-think what types of spaces are necessary for [contesting the](#) socially constructed nature of disability.

Further research is nonetheless [needed](#). Indeed, given Development Studies' [cultural turn](#), the [geographical field](#) would benefit from exploring the Potentials' [encounters with mixed ability CI](#) and examining such individuals as creative subjects,

capable of genuine struggle. This might have valuable political implications for thinking about dance practice as a social uplift tool more broadly.

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