

# Exhibiting images of disabled dancers: comparison, reconstruction or disruption?

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## **Exhibiting images of disabled dancers: Comparison, reconstruction or disruption?**

Kathryn Stamp

*When People Dancing's 2013 '11 Million Reasons' (11MR) project was first advertised, the vision for the photography exhibition was to 'recreate iconic dance moments in film'<sup>1</sup>. When the 2016 follow-on project '11 Million Reasons to Dance' (11MRTD) was conceptualised, the exhibition's premise was described as commissioning 'images of iconic dance moments from film, all reimagined by Deaf, sight impaired and disabled dancers'<sup>2</sup>. This shift from 'recreated' to 'reimagined', as well as the decision to use a RE approach at all for an intervention, was intriguing. This article explores the meaning, purpose and use of the RE prefix, evaluating its use in dance contexts, its impact when used within disability contexts and its use for the 11MRTD project, as well as considering questions raised by the project regarding the recreation of popular dance scenes in relation to the viewing of non-normative bodies by public audiences.*

**Keywords:** dance, disability, People Dancing, interventions, prefixes, framing

Terminology with the RE prefix is widely used within dance discourse, as a discipline with a certain focus on repetition and examples of recreation as preservation. The RE prefix is used in technique classes, rehearsal sessions, throughout the choreographic process and in discussions regarding documentation. Often, adding RE prefix may create a word which has various connotations or meanings, for example 'recreations' can also be confused with 'recreational' activities (meaning hobby-like activities), emphasising a need for clarity in how prefixes are used. The most appropriate term for a dance event is reliant on the root word it is placed before to translate its meaning, but it is not always clear which aspect of the event is referred to. For example, a dance performance might be labelled a reconstruction, but this often does not define whether this repeated construction concerns the choreographic process being repeated, the movements (as 'bricks') used to build a new work or simply that a dance work has fallen and is now being 'rebuilt'.

Additionally, how the RE itself is interpreted when used in dance activity is important as understanding could vary due to RE's dual meaning: back and again. This paper focuses on the RE prefix as it primarily appears in the context of dance but I also explore its relevance for dance photography and its use for dance and disability interventions.

The 11MRTD project was an intervention that explored the intersection between dance and disability. It is important to consider the relevance of the RE prefix not only within a dance context but also within disability discourse. With RE meaning either back or again<sup>3</sup>,



*The Wizard of Oz.* Dancer: Laura Jones. Photo: Sean Goldthorpe; © People Dancing (2014) All Rights Reserved.

this article investigates how its usage might affect an audience's perception of disabled dance performers and their positioning within the 11MRTD project specifically. I explore the concept of 'representation', as a commonly used RE term within disability discourse, and draw upon disability literature to illuminate discussions regarding the labelling of the 11MRTD project as a REcreation or a REimagining. In addition, this article evaluates the potential impact and complexities for other kinds of interventions that use the RE prefix and consider whether an alternative approach to language in dance and disability interventions might better progress discussion regarding dance and disability performers within the dance industry. In particular, I argue that closer attention needs to be paid to the use of prefixes within dance activity, to ensure the framing of activities (or interventions) does not mislead the viewer.

### **The RE Prefix**

To explore the significance of the RE prefix for the 11MRTD project, dance more generally and disability studies, literature regarding the prefix itself and its definition must first be surveyed.

Therefore, topic searches led to reviewing literature from disciplines including linguistics, biological sciences and ecology. These fields were selected as they have literature that directly addresses the use and intention of RE processes within their area, as opposed to simply using RE terms without consideration of their impact. Through analysis of these writings, different meanings and uses of the prefix are uncovered, before looking more closely at its use in dance studies and then its significance within disability discourse.

To begin, the complexity of RE's use can be demonstrated through linguistic studies, exploring, in almost mathematical terms, the purpose and use of the prefix within the English language. The linguistics researcher Víctor Acedo-Matellán explains that 'Semantically, [the RE] prefix adds the presupposition that there has been some previous stage in which the entity referred to by the direct object was in the same state as that indicated by the verb'<sup>4</sup>. For example, the statement 'Jessica reheated the pasta' suggests that Jessica caused the pasta to be heated and also indicates that, at some point, the pasta had previously been hot. A connection is made, therefore, between the current state of the object and a previous state before the recurrence. This suggests that the RE prefix has a particular focus on referencing the past or going back in order to emphasize a change in state.

Additionally, consideration as to whether a verb requires or allows for the addition of the RE prefix depends on the verb itself and its meaning. In particular, Wechsler indicates that it is important whether the verb indicates an accomplishment or an activity, as '...path accomplishments lack result states and accept *re-*, while activities lack result states (by definition) and disallow *re-* (*\*resleep, repush a cart*)'<sup>5</sup>. The point here is that some root words do not require the addition of the RE prefix when describing something happening again, such as *resleep* or *repush*, as mentioned, because the root word implies an activity being undertaken without any indication of the result state accomplished at the end of it. However, other words require the RE prefix in order to highlight how something is being completed *again*, usually because they are things that are accomplished, rather than an activity without a specific accomplishment or result state. Therefore, the RE prefix, as seen in the examples quoted by Wechsler, rarely accompanies regularly occurring activities that do not

result in a change in outcome. This suggests that RE references a past state or circumstance, but also recognises that there can be a possible change in the object that is the focus of the phrase. However, Wechsler also highlights that the RE prefix, as well as more generally connoting a return to a previous state, also connotes something being achieved *again*, with no suggestion of significant change in form or state<sup>6</sup>.

Looking more closely at the interpretation of the RE prefix meaning *to go back*, returning to or referencing the original root concept, object, verb or idea, one must consider what they are returning to. In ecological studies, the RE prefix is commonly used, especially when attempting preservation or restoration initiatives. However, as ecologist Richard Corlett remarks, close attention must be paid to what state one is returning something to, suggesting that the question of return condition is '[i]nherent in the use of the 're' prefix'<sup>7</sup>. This suggests that researchers exploring the use of the RE prefix, those using RE terminology, or those who are attempting to achieve a RE state, should carefully examine the roots of their RE process and the conditions for achieving the RE state.

The suggestion that change can occur through the RE process is one explored largely through the sciences, and biology in particular. The French writer and thinker Edgar Morin suggests that the prefix RE should not be simply considered as a prefix, but rather a 'paradigmatic concept that informs all our thinking'<sup>8</sup>. Through his analysis of RE terminology from physics and biology, Morin seeks to shift the perception of the RE prefix away from the process of achieving the exact same result state (cloning) to the process of achieving the same result state but with differences (evolving). What is highlighted through Morin's writing is the newness of concepts and objects that are spawned through the RE prefix. The duality of the prefix, of generating and also re-generating, is emphasised by Morin and supports the linguistic analysis, of returning back to an original or root state. However, Morin goes beyond this analysis to suggest that,

[The re- prefix] fabricates new events, forms, and structures from the procession of past events, forms, and structures. So, in the sense of the grand diaspora of time, living RE revives in the present fragments/islands of a dead past... Thus, each self-

organizing process that seems to be only the execution of a program and maintained by a status quo, in fact displays a repetition that is a resurrection. To be resurrected is to be the bearer of renewal.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than viewing RE processes as simply cyclical repetition, it is being proposed that each rotation results in the production of a new form. However, this would suggest an inability to return to an original state, as even returning to a seemingly original state would not be achievable due to the process of RE being undertaken. The state of the subject will be altered in some way due to the affecting process of being made RE.

Discussion of RE as looking back and of creating something new requires recognition of the original subject or root that has been affected by the RE process. Therefore, it offers the question, what does one need to know about the original in order to best understand the RE that has been created from it? These original subjects or, in linguistic terms, 'roots'<sup>10</sup> may have to be understood in their original form in order to be understood after the process of RE has taken place. Exploring science, ecology and linguistic studies may not appear relevant to dance, but exploring debates around prefix use (RE in particular) are useful for thinking more expansively about the application of RE within dance and disability interventions. Taking the 11MRTD project as an example, to understand what is meant by labelling the exhibition photographs as 'reimaginings', I would suggest that there needs to be understanding of what an 'imagining' is in the first instance.

### **RE Use in Dance**

Building upon this exploration of the prefix RE, the role of the prefix within the context of dance and performance will now be investigated. Dance is an art form replete with RE prefix vocabulary: repetition, restaging, refine, reset, rewind, react, record, rehearse and re-do, for example.

However, it is important to note that some of these usually hyphenate and some do not, which may be why some activities that are labelled as RE might mislead people as to their true meanings.

Performance theorists Kartsaki and Schmidt illustrate this further by demonstrating how,

We might think of performance as the art of the 're': from the labour of rehearsal and systems for remembering to the broad spectrum of restored behaviours that are 'not for the first time'; from tragic scenes of recognition and reversal to conventions of citation and recitation; from the dream of representation without reproduction to the ethics of reenactment and the care for what remains.<sup>11</sup>

Dance is a discipline that emphasises and utilises a cyclical process of development and progression, therefore reflecting the definition of RE as a way of looking back or referencing the past, as well as the production of something new or changed. Much of the literature regarding RE in dance focuses on the ephemeral act of moving, the rehearsal process and/or the choreographic process. While the 11MRTD photography exhibition focused on still images of dance, literature will be appraised and concepts explored that could be relevant for still images of movement or the staging of dance photography involving disabled practitioners.

One of the more commonly referenced RE processes used in dance study, history and practice is that of *reconstruction*. While there has been considerable research regarding the reconstruction of historical dance works and their significance (Adler 1984; Martin 2000; Dika 2016), discussion of what the term reconstruction means seems limited, with focus more on approaches to and analysis of the process of reconstruction than the meaning of the term reconstruction itself. However, dance researcher Helen Thomas has investigated the concept of reconstruction in dance and suggests there are two key concepts in the reconstruction process, which must be considered in any discussion regarding reconstruction and before embarking on a reconstruction attempt: authenticity and interpretation<sup>12</sup>. This links to RE's dual definition: looking back (authenticity) and creating again with a possible change of state (interpretation). The inclusion of the verb *to construct* within reconstruction has connotations of building, piecing together something from supplied materials. Reconstruction in dance often implies famous works pieced back together as an attempt at preservation or celebration and to keep the work 'alive', commonly after a choreographer's death.



*Dirty Dancing*. Dancers: Welly O'Brien and Mickael Marso Riviere. Photo: Sean Goldthorpe; © People Dancing (2014) All Rights Reserved.

What happens to the original dance work is something that must be considered when exploring the cyclical RE process and it has been suggested that the process of reconstruction can result in the creation of, as Ramsay Burt describes, corpses. Burt explains how 'an illustrated corpse' is created when original styles or performances are frozen from a particular era, but acknowledges that there are 'cases where the disappearance of a particular style of performing is a diminution of the overall range of possibilities'<sup>13</sup>. While this illustrates how RE could be viewed as limiting a work by eliminating the liveness of it, resulting in its preservation in death, it also highlights the possibility of losing works by not preserving them. Many popular ballet works that have been reconstructed are still performed, with at least some 'original' choreography, after over 100 years, Marius Petipa's *Swan Lake* for example. Dance critic Judith Mackrell has even commented that 'the way to re-energise the 19<sup>th</sup> century classics is by reinventing their stories'<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, perhaps continual reconstruction of dance works aids longevity and, through preservation, the styles, detail and context for works are sustained.

There may be a question regarding the allowance for interpretation or innovation when reconstructing a dance work as to when something changes from being a recreation of the original to the creation of something new. One choreographer whose works have been labelled in reviews as reconstructions is Matthew Bourne, who creates new versions of traditional ballet repertoire, with a contemporary ballet movement style and a highly theatrical approach to set design and costume<sup>15</sup>. Other labels given to Bourne's dance works include 'adaptations'<sup>16</sup>, 'remakes'<sup>17</sup> and 're-



imaginings'<sup>18</sup>. There is no denying that Bourne's works engage with the RE process by both looking back at the original and inventing something new, as defined earlier in this paper. However, it could be asked whether a dance work can be a reconstruction if the majority of its elements are not original materials. Helen Thomas suggests that it can, and proposes that there are 'two different views of reconstruction, the one 'authentic' to the original work, the other 'interpretative' of the spirit of the work'<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, Bourne's work can be considered not only as utilising a RE process of creation, but can also be understood as reconstructions of previous ballet works through the bringing together of past characteristics of the former repertoire. But then there might be a question regarding a re-constructed dance work as to who is credited for the choreography, design, or concept.

From this discussion, it appears that there are often multiple RE terms used to describe a single, particular process, as detailed above regarding Matthew Bourne. This could be due to a misunderstanding around the innate detail and nuances of RE terminology that is used without careful consideration of the specific word choice. If the RE prefix is defined by its reference not only to the past but also to the new creations devised through a cyclical process, I propose that RE words can be categorised depending on their alignment with either of these definitions, or with both. Not all RE terminology connotes personalisation and there are a number of dance researchers whose work seeks to resurrect past dance work only to preserve it, not to reinvent it, for example, Lesley Main's work with the Doris Humphrey Foundation<sup>20</sup> or Carol Martin's exploration of Frederick Ashton's history and legacy<sup>21</sup>. This practice might be more appropriately labelled revision, revival or restaging. Words that suggest the creation of something new such as remake, reconstruct and reimagine, might be more in line with dance practitioners who seek to evolve or innovate from the past.

This discussion regarding terminology suggests a number of possible explanations for the multiple and varied use of the RE prefix in writing or discussing dance. Firstly, the purpose and intention of a dance researcher or choreographer embarking on the RE process should influence how a work

(or works) is discussed. Secondly, perhaps this is more of a comment on the nature and practices of dance writing than of terminology understanding.

Innate in discussions surrounding the replication of dance works are debates concerning ephemerality in dance. Dance movement, as with music in an aural sense, is experienced visually for a moment and then departs and, as dance theorist and practitioner Rebecca Schneider has described, 'performance [is] a process of disappearance, of an ephemerality read as vanishment (versus material remains)<sup>22</sup>. If we adopt Schneider's view of performance as fleeting moments this supposes that our ability to re-create, re-construct, re-enact, re-stage or re-vise dance works will be inhibited by this ephemerality. Many debates surrounding these topics of ephemerality and revision look to documentation tools and archiving as possible solutions to 'accurately' record dance (thus preserving it for potential use in the future). There are those who view what remains from a performance, in participants' memories or through supporting documentation, as useful to take forward into a possible RE process. For example, it is through the traces of historical dance works, such as notation scores, choreographer notes, photographs, that new recreations or productions of these works can be created. One method of documenting dance, which reduces the inhibition of ephemerality in recreating dance, is film or video, as it records the nuances of movement that might not be captured by other documentation tools.

In discussing Stephanie Wuertz's 2014 recreation of Loïe Fuller's *Serpentine* dance (1891), Vera Dika (2016) takes the opportunity to analyse and examine the political, cultural and artistic issues that surround Fuller's work. This particular remaking is discussed here because it intersects live dance performance and documentation through film and photography. Fuller's performances were often documented on film and are regarded by some as an early development of 'narrative cinema'<sup>23</sup>. Dika's writing indicates that, while Wuertz's process is labeled 'remaking', there is a sense of development and interpretation in how Wuertz 'updated the performance...and, ultimately, challenged it'<sup>24</sup>. With the passage of time between Fuller's original performance and Wuertz's performance, over 100 years, it is perhaps inevitable that the remake would involve elements of change, because the context surrounding the original work was unachievable given

the years that had passed. Regardless of whether the context and time shift influenced the choreographer, there is a question as to whether such a work is deemed an accurate remake of the original (if this was possible) or simply an interpretation of the original<sup>25</sup>.

Due to its ephemeral nature, it has been suggested that dance, once performed, cannot be repeated exactly as it was. It becomes history immediately. Discussing the ontology and preservation possibilities of performance, Peggy Phelan wrote that,

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being...becomes itself through disappearance.<sup>26</sup>

While Phelan's notion of performance has been somewhat refined since her original proposal<sup>27</sup>, and faced significant criticism, challenge and debate<sup>28</sup>, there is still relevance for this discussion regarding the repeatability of dance. If each performance is its final performance, each new performance of the 'same' work is instantly different or varied in some way, namely from the passage of time. This is further supported by Ketu Katrak, who agreed that 'live performance is different from any kind of reproduction' and that 'In our increasingly media-saturated world, we may well have to contend with different forms of "liveness"'<sup>29</sup>, also making this debate regarding ephemerality and recreation even more relevant to a project that recreates film works through a photographic exhibition.

### **RE and Disability Discourse**

The complexity of RE language within dance discourse is something shared with disability discourse. Language within disability studies is widely discussed and often shifting. An examination of disability literature in relation to the RE prefix follows, with the aim of gaining insights relevant to this discussion. As explored at the beginning of this paper, the RE prefix can be used to reference

the past and to achieve a new creation. By referencing the past and attempting to recreate this, one may ask how things move forward beyond this one state of being. Writings on the development of the Social Model of Disability contain a number of illustrations of the RE process in disability studies, such as Tom Shakespeare's discussion regarding the model's 're-definition' of disability that moved away from emphasis on over-medicalisation and onus on the individual's impairments<sup>30</sup>, or Hughes and Paterson's possibility of 'reconstructing' the view of impairment away from fearful responses and towards positive understanding<sup>31</sup>.

A common RE prefix widely used in disability discourse is *representation*. It is important to distinguish here the difference between representation and re-presentation. Representation (via one meaning) refers to portraying or speaking for a particular group and re-presentation is the process of presenting something for a second time (or more). The discussion here focuses more on the former, not on re-presenting something prior, which questions its identity as a 'prefix' term. While the meaning between the two is potentially quite different, there is a possible interpretation that representation might involve re-presenting what might be viewed as normative, in a new way. Nevertheless, representation is an important element of disability discourse and due to ambiguity in the understanding of prefixes (representation or re-presentation), the relevant issues will be explored here.

There is another definition of representation that is of interest to this discussion. Found in literature discourse and common in film theory, the term representation is derived from philosophical meaning, most notably from the work of Aristotle and often explored in relation to Plato's notion of imitation<sup>32</sup>. However, it has been noted that representation goes beyond 'plain imitation'; it is refined to present aspects of life in a special (aesthetic or poetic) way. The represented aspects are presented as essences, fragments, perspectives, from which the spectator recognises and gains deep insight on aspects of true life<sup>33</sup>. Emerging from explorations of mimesis, a theoretical principle of art, the concept of representation, as being a characteristic that alludes to something else, is complex. With links to semiotics, this concept also relates to Performing Arts scholar Matthew Reason's<sup>34</sup> argument that dance photography can be

*representational*, suggesting movement and quality beyond what is shown in a single photograph, an approach relevant to understanding of the 11MRTD project.

This discussion highlights why exploration of the term representation is significant for this project that intersects disability and dance theatre (and photography). As media theory and visual cultural scholar W. J. Mitchell explains, 'One obvious question that comes up in contemporary theories of representation...is the relationship between aesthetic or semiotic representation (things that "stand for" other things) and political representation (persons who "act for" other persons). One place where these two forms of representation come together is the theatre, where persons (actors) stand [in] for or "impersonate" other (usually fictional) persons'<sup>35</sup>. This question becomes even more relevant when we consider the pervasive and growing debate around non-disabled performers playing disabled characters<sup>36</sup> and the multi-level significance of the term representation within disability studies discourse.

The representation, here understood as the portrayal of a particular person(s), of disabled people in media, film, advertising, sport and politics has been widely researched, both in academic fields and sector-facing publications. In order to investigate the RE prefix within disability discourse, representation is significant to explore as a foundation; to consider what is meant by representation. Representations, as disability scholar Grue describes, are 'reference points for both individuals who definitely consider themselves disabled, individuals who definitely consider themselves non-disabled, and for the large number of people who may or may not see themselves as disabled'<sup>37</sup>. What is emphasised here is how representation is subjective and deeply embedded within people's perceptions of themselves and others. This goes some way to explain why representation for marginalised groups is so widely researched and debated.

Similarly, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2013) writes about the *systems of representation* through feminist theory, stating how the elements within the system work together to perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce ableist norms and sustain discrimination, explaining how,

Discriminatory practices are legitimated by systems of representation, by collective cultural stories that shape the material world, underwrite exclusionary attitudes, inform human relations, and mold our senses of who we are. Understanding how disability functions along with other systems of representation clarifies how all the systems intersect and mutually constitute one another.<sup>38</sup>

This might suggest that in order to subjugate the norm and disengage from the common systems of representations, a more radical approach to intervention is needed.

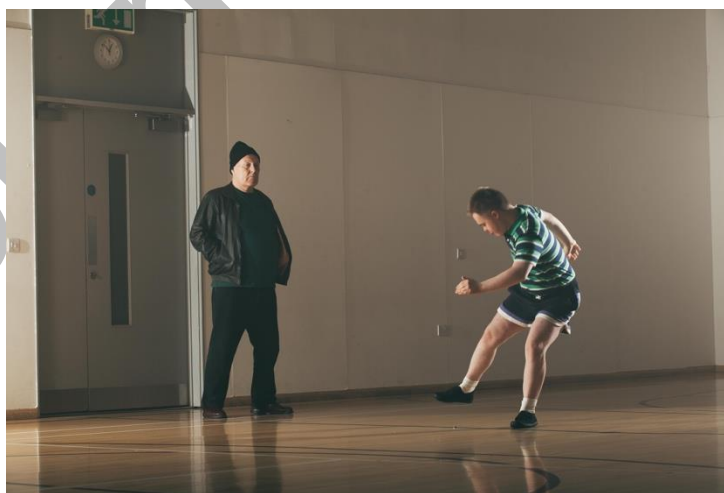
If we consider the RE prefix to revert to or reference the past, as explored previously, there is the need to analyse what effect this process of returning to 'the original' has in terms of disability discourse. If the original object, source, concept is viewed as normative, it is likely that any re-incarnations of that will be viewed as non-normative. Therefore, the RE prefix could be viewed as reinforcing the binary between normative and non-normative, perpetuating the 'other'. Taking the example of the Paralympics, the 'original' or first form, from which the Paralympics is derived and built upon, is the Olympics. Though the Paralympics continually strive to re-establish themselves as an independent sporting event alone, comparisons are consistently made to the Olympics, either through discussing the bias in media coverage, particular athletes such as debating Oscar Pistorius' attempt to participate in both events, or simply the connection in name, location and timeframe for the events. However, as Bertling highlights<sup>39</sup>, without the Olympic movement, the Paralympics would not necessarily exist as we know it. Although in this example it is the suffix 'lympics' that connects the two events by name, it illustrates how a disability-focused event can be compared to a 'normative' original state if they are closely linked in style, name and content.

### **RE-calling: The Complexity of Comparison**

The discussion of the use of the prefix RE more generally in dance, performance and disability discourse, now moves to focus specifically on its role within the 11MRTD project. The 11MR photography exhibition was a public display of images, created and toured with the intention of being viewed by the public. By portraying the disabled dance performers in a photography

exhibition, there was an expectation that more people would engage in spectatorship than would through watching a live dance performance. Due to the reimagined nature of the images, scenes from popular films being recreated with a disabled dancer as the protagonist, audiences could be encouraged to recall the original film scene and connect it in some way to the image they see before them. Therefore, a processing experience would take place through the viewing, which could affect perceptions of the images, and those bodies on display through them.

This process of recalling engages in an experience of comparison, perpetuated by the identification of recognisable features from popularised film scenes. The RE process within film studies is often utilised, with film remakes being a popular route of creation by producers. Film and television researcher Zanger's work has explored film remakes and the repetitive nature of remakes as rituals, with an emphasis on difference as contribution to the progression of film, explaining that 'since repetition and difference function in mutual interdependence, the economy of cinematic versions is that of difference in repetition'<sup>40</sup>. Here Zanger is accentuating the need for difference in remakes to prolong the life, and popularity, of a film, similar to the earlier discussion of how dance works are reconstructed and revived for preservation. This could support the approach to the 11MRTD photography exhibition as it could be seen as bringing new life to films through the emphasis on difference.



*Billy Elliot*. Dancers: Gil and Jake Maguire. Photo: Sean Goldthorpe; © People Dancing (2014) All Rights Reserved.

Zanger also describes the experience of an audience member viewing a film remake as interacting with an individual's 'imaginary archive'. This mental archive, collated in the spectator's mind,

contains filmic artefacts that have been retained by the viewer and can, therefore, produce a 'network of comparisons among them'<sup>41</sup>. Thus, viewers of the 11MRTD photography exhibition will bring with them a bank of knowledge and perceptions of the films being reimagined (varying depending on whether they have actually seen the film, how many times they have seen it or their knowledge of the film if they have not seen it), and in viewing the images can make new network comparisons within their imaginary archive, referencing Zanger's concept.

The experience of referencing or recalling an original image or work is linked to a form of nostalgia, as discussed by Whatley, who also posits a possible reading of the 11MRTD images as 'an ersatz stand-in for the original images'<sup>42</sup>. Here Whatley presents the idea that these images can be experienced positively or negatively through nostalgic viewing, with the negative risk of the images being seen as inferior copies of the originals. The images were recreated with an emphasis on difference in order to attempt to change audience perceptions and therefore embraced innovation in order to avoid being viewed simply as a reproduction of the original scenes. Whatley also makes connections to the concept of 'false nostalgia' and the longing for times that we ourselves have not experienced<sup>43</sup>. The dazzling 'pzazz' of dance scenes from films, usually replete with extravagant costumes and/or engrossing plotlines (although not always, such as the simple costuming of *Billy Elliott* (2000) or the urban setting of *Step Up 4* (2012)), engage viewers in a way that creates a sense of aspiration for a time that has passed.

While the intention of dance interventions that involve the RE process, including 11MRTD, may be to positively recreate something with the aim of shifting perceptions or opinions, the use of RE in the approach could be viewed as either challenging or perpetuating audience's current understanding of the disabled dancer experience. In his discussion regarding representations of disabled people in the media, Colin Barnes (1992) highlights how the positioning of people with disabilities within 'normal' scenarios, settings and contexts does not do enough to confront or unpick non-disabled people's understanding of disability, explaining how

[an] emphasis on youth and commerciality represents little more than a 'normalisation' of disability which does not really challenge or undermine its



meaning to non-disabled people. Like all media portrayals of disabled people they do not reflect the racial, gender, and cultural divisions within the disabled community as a whole -disabled people do not fit neatly into able-bodied perceptions of normality.<sup>44</sup>

Barnes is highlighting the need for representations of disabled people that do more to challenge perceptions that are held by non-disabled people, and avoid the easy acceptance of disabled people 'fitting' the norm. While Barnes might have been writing over two decades ago, his observations are still relevant here, and perhaps discussion around disability interventions needs to look more closely at the process of comparison and recalling within spectatorship. This view seems to shift the focus away from prefixes that simply present disability artists as a new alternative to a normative 'original' and instead seeks to find a prefix that can do more to dismantle or confront people's perceptions of disabled dance artists. This needs to go further in expanding the discussion and dismantling traditional representations of disabled dancers. A new approach might seek to interrogate the sources of perceptions or the influences on perception creation, rather than to simply change or shift a perception on a superficial level.

### **DIS-rupting Memories**

While this exploration thus far has been discussing the 11MRTD project in terms of the RE process and approach, there needs to be consideration of whether a RE approach is the most appropriate or impactful for an intervention hoping to change public perceptions of disabled dancers.

Discussion has explored how the RE prefix can connote referencing the past or acknowledging 'the original', which could be seen to perpetuate normative ideals. The idea that RE evokes comparison could be seen as going backwards, rather than looking ahead with the aim to progress change.

This is further reinforced by the dance scholar Mark Franko who, when discussing re-enactments, explains that they 'tell us the past is not over: the past is unfinished business'<sup>45</sup>, emphasising how the use of RE brings that past to the fore. However, the sense that RE suggests the creation of something new might oppose this view and encourage a new way of looking at the past that creates something new in its place. To further this discussion, the use of DIS as an intervention

approach is examined, proposing that this prefix not only allows a chance for more radical interrogation of audience perceptions than the RE prefix, but it also offers an opportunity to take ownership of the DIS prefix used within a disability context.

The 11MR photography exhibition presented disabled dance artists recreating (or reimagining) dance scenes from popular films that each illustrate a particular dance genre and presentation style. By deciding to reimagine something that has been arranged previously in a particular way, and by encouraging replication of specific features of the dance scenes, there seems to be a lack of originality in how the dancers in the images are presented. Many of the dancers who took part in the project have different aesthetic preferences and artistic approaches to character, costuming and movements than those that were curated for the images, with one artist explaining that 'I suppose I see myself, um, firmly positioned in the contemporary dance sector, and I think what makes me feel slightly at odds with the exhibition overall and particularly with my image is I don't think my nondisabled counterparts would do [this]. I'm not quite clear on what that means to me yet. So I think there's something about integrity that I can't quite put my finger on.' (excerpt from interview participant). This raises issues around agency and the failure to communicate the artists' personal and professional identities through the project.

While the aim of the project was not exclusively to share the performers' individual identity, abilities and professional practice to audiences, it was detailed in the funding application for 11MRTD that the project sought to develop new job opportunities for professional dance artists. There was also an emphasis in the 11MRTD project on developing future performance and touring opportunities. The presentation of the dance artists as recreations of particular characters, conforming to particular aesthetics, does little to support the presentation of their own artistic practice to wider audiences for potential job opportunities. The images in the 11MR exhibition may be seen as artists striving for a particular non-disabled aesthetic that has been presented in the films that have been reimaged, rather than presenting their own, unique movement and performance aesthetics.



*Singin' in the Rain*. Dancer: Mickel Smithen. Photo: Sean Goldthorpe; © People Dancing (2014) All Rights Reserved.

Given this discussion regarding the impact of RE as a prefix, and as a frame for dance and disability interventions, and the potential adverse impact of using it, I am proposing that a more radical, challenging approach to intervention design is needed. Consideration of how interventions can work to challenge perceptions as a form of perception change could have a greater impact for, or give more agency to the disabled dancers who are the intended beneficiaries of a project. This alternative approach could utilise the DIS prefix over the RE. With DIS connoting separation, this shift in approach to interventions might have an alternative impact and provide space to reflect on and interrogate perceptions more deeply.

Rather than looking to repeat, reaffirm or refer to normative ideals, DIS could have the power to avoid comparison and affirm the abilities of disabled dance practitioners on their own terms.

The term *disability* itself is prefixed with the DIS prefix, which has caused much debate over the past decades. This will now be examined further to illuminate the discussion regarding prefixes. The complexity of language within disability discourse has been widely discussed (Grue 2015; Albright 2010; Shakespeare 2013) and there are contrasting views regarding the DIS within Disability. Dance scholar Ann Cooper-Albright highlights her uneasiness with the DIS prefix within disability, saying

Although I struggle...with the adjective *disabled*, I have come to appreciate the word *disability*, which I sometimes write as *dis/ability*. I have coined this new spelling in order to exaggerate the intellectual precipice implied by this word. The slash, for me, refuses the comfort of a stereotype.<sup>46</sup>

While this is Albright's personal view and experience of using the word 'disabled', it does highlight the potentially negative viewing of the word and, subsequently, those people who are labelled as such. With DIS meaning 'apart' or 'reversing', its location next to the word 'ability' can connote lacking ability or having alternative abilities. However, by taking ownership of the word, Cooper-Albright is attempting to disassociate the term dis/ability from the normative and non-normative binary by disrupting the ease to which it can be (and is) used, causing people to consider its meaning. It should also be emphasised that the addition of the forward slash in the word disability is a personal choice, and this can be a contentious factor in debates about disability language<sup>47</sup>.

This discussion regarding the use and preference of disability language is not new. There are some who believe the term 'disability', with its inclusion of the DIS prefix, has negative connotations due to its use in terms such as disorganised or disadvantaged<sup>48</sup>. However, there has been a clear move to reclaim disability language as a form of power and agency for and by disabled people over recent years. Disabled writer Penny Pepper wrote in 2016 about the debate between people-first (person with a disability) and identity-first language (disabled person), explaining how, 'For me...I am now happy to call myself and to be called a disabled person, which puts me in the company of some fine comrades and allies sharing a fight to dismantle the disabling society'<sup>49</sup>. Pepper's article highlights the journey many disabled people take to find strength in their disabled identity, suggesting a need to embrace the DIS prefix as a site of quiet protest and shifting activism.

Disability studies scholar Lennard J. Davis, emphasises how understanding of 'normal' is needed as a prerequisite for exploring disability, as the binary of normative and non-normative is inherent in the language of disability (2013). Therefore, while DIS as a prefix can be viewed as suggesting separation or reversal in some frames, with some negative connotations, it also appears to have power in its use with some words, such as 'disrupt', 'disturb' or 'dismantle' (as used by Pepper, above), connoting a shift or rupture, although power here could be inherent in the root word concepts (e.g. rupture and turbulence). Compared with the RE prefix, DIS seems to have more

uses that suggest a greater change, or change at a deeper level, and does not refer to an original state, which can be complex when used to discuss disability.

It is proposed that thinking about particular DIS words that connote rupture or transformation can help to develop a framework for intervention activities that seeks to change perceptions around disability and dance. For example, 'disruption' or 'distortion' as a focus for an intervention could help to lead a shift away from normative ideals or 'originals' implied in a RE prefix. This referral to an original state brings about a process of comparison, which is complicated when occurring in interventions that involve disabled people. Using a DIS approach to an intervention seeks not only to avoid this complex and potentially damaging response, but also to encourage viewers to examine and question their own reactions. Considering this from a constructivist perspective<sup>50</sup>, a DIS approach to intervention design could help trigger perception changes through questioning, challenge and new perspectives. It should be noted that, as with most discussions regarding disability language, no term is perfect and therefore no approach will work for everyone, but this research has highlighted that the RE term is enmeshed with ableist ideals and normative understandings of the past, suggesting that a more radical approach is needed. With the growing movement towards reclaiming the term disability as a mode of empowerment, more projects that use a DIS approach could help to dismantle accepted norms and stereotyped understandings of disability.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the impact of the RE prefix as a catalyst for change within dance and disability interventions. The duality of the prefix highlights the possible dual interpretations of a RE term, either as something done again (possibly with a difference) or as referring back to an original state and highlighting the distance/change between the two entities. By exploring the RE prefix within a variety of different disciplinary fields, the multiplicity of its uses within different subject areas highlights a need for clarification regarding how it is used within dance.

While much dance literature on the RE prefix discusses live performance, exploration of the use of RE within an art form that is so widely viewed as ephemeral is of great significance to all forms of dance events, including dance interventions. This ephemerality not only highlights the key role that photography can play in capturing (and re-capturing) movement so that it can be referenced repeatedly, but also brings forth the complexity in RE processes that are used in dance, due to the uniqueness of each performance, and where relevant, the struggle to attempt an 'accurate' representation.

The relevance of RE within disability discourse can be complex, with the (comparative) connotation of RE potentially perpetuating normative ideals through its own definition suggesting 'other', by referring to an original or going back. However, RE can also suggest newness; the creation of something fresh and different, which has links to an original state that is no longer present, but assigned to the past. Therefore, the use of RE within disability interventions could have two potential impacts, depending on how the intervention is framed and its audience responses. Firstly, disabled participants in the intervention might be compared with the 'original' non-disabled participants, highlighting expectations placed on disabled people to achieve or 'live up to' the standards set by non-disabled people. Secondly, disability interventions might present a new way of viewing disability and inclusion through a process of disrupting familiarity and nostalgia.

Here I am making an argument regarding the impact language can have on an intervention and how it is subsequently received by audiences. Language is important, not only for general understanding of what is being communicated, but specifically when communicating messages about inclusion. Exploration of the RE prefix, and consideration of possible alternative prefixes such as the DIS prefix, highlights the complexity of language that can subtly accentuate differences and can, therefore, influence respondents' perceptions. Careful consideration of language used to frame, market and present an intervention involving disabled bodies is vital, not only to ensure that communication is clear, but also to avoid misrepresentation and damaging narrative or stereotypes of disability.

Through this paper I have suggested that RE prefixed interventions have the potential to perpetuate normative and ableist ideals. So there seems to be merit in searching for alternative approaches to designing interventions that seek to challenge viewers and interrogate current perceptions or interrupt the creation of new perceptions of what has been viewed or experienced. By exploring the DIS prefix, I have investigated an alternative wealth of terms for framing an intervention, which might have greater potential than the RE prefix. This alternative approach has the potential to expand and probe people's perceptions of disabled dancers, thus changing the way disabled dance performers are viewed as performers in their own right, rather than altered 'copies' of performers or characters that have gone before.

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Word Count: 8836

#### Notes:

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- <sup>1</sup> People Dancing, *11 Million Reasons* [online] available from <<https://www.communitydance.org.uk/eb/view.aspx?ref=n1yetszi72utjnh5ehbb&rec=5855-0>> [29 January 2020]
- <sup>2</sup> People Dancing (2020a) *11 Million Reasons to Dance* [online] available from <<https://www.communitydance.org.uk/creative-programmes/11-million-reasons-to-dance>> [23 January 2020]
- <sup>3</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary's description of 're' as a prefix that indicates back or again, as well as 'denoting that the action itself is performed a second time, and sometimes that its result is to reverse a previous action or process, or to restore a previous state of things'. See Oxford English Dictionary, 're- prefix', <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158795?rskey=xHy58w&result=7#> accessed August 5, 2021
- <sup>4</sup> Acedo-Matellán, V. (2014) 'Can We Dance Without Doing a Dance?: Two Opposite Views on the Integration of Roots in the Syntactic Structure of the vP'. in *Structuring the Argument: Multidisciplinary research on verb argument structure* ed. by Bachrach, A., Roy, I. and Stockall, L. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Co., 25
- <sup>5</sup> Wechsler, S. (1989) *Accomplishments and the Prefix re-*. Proceedings of NELS: 1989. Stanford: Stanford University, 4
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Corlett, R. T. (2016) 'Restoration, Reintroduction, and Rewilding in a Changing World', *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*. 31 (6), 453
- <sup>8</sup> Morin, E. (2005) 'RE: From Prefix to Paradigm', *World Futures*. 61 (4), 255
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. 261
- <sup>10</sup> Acedo-Matellán, V. (2014) 'Can We Dance Without Doing a Dance?: Two Opposite Views on the Integration of Roots in the Syntactic Structure of the vP'. in *Structuring the Argument: Multidisciplinary research on verb argument structure* ed. by Bachrach, A., Roy, I. and Stockall, L. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Co.
- <sup>11</sup> Kartsaki, E. and Schmidt, T. (2015) 'Editorial: On Repetition', *Performance Research*. 20 (5), 1
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas, H. (2003) *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory*. Basingstoke: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 121
- <sup>13</sup> Burt, R. (2000) 'Reconstructing the Disturbing New Spaces of Modernity: The Ballet *Skating Rink*' in *Preservation Politics: Dance Revived, Reconstructed, Remade* ed. by Jordan, S. London: Dance Books, 23
- <sup>14</sup> Mackrell, J. (2015) 'Ratmanky's royal flush: the most authentic Sleeping Beauty I've Seen'. *The Guardian* [online] 30 Sept. available from <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/sep/30/alexei-ratmanky-the-sleeping-beauty-la-scala>> [26 August 2018]
- <sup>15</sup> Hirschhorn, J. (2004) "Matthew Bourne's Nutcracker". *Variety* [online] 19 Dec. available from <<https://variety.com/2004/legit/markets-festivals/matthew-bourne-s-nutcracker-1200528992/>> [20 August 2018]

- <sup>16</sup> Acocella, J. (2017) '“The Red Shoes” Becomes a Ballet'. *The New Yorker* [online] 30 Oct. available from < <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/10/30/the-red-shoes-becomes-a-ballet> > [20 August 2018]
- <sup>17</sup> Higgins, C. (2006) "In the Company of Men". *The Guardian* [online] 23 Dec. available from < <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/dec/23/dance> > [20 August 2018]
- <sup>18</sup> Bowie-Sell, D. (2015) 'Matthew Bourne: 'I see myself as a man of the theatre''. *WhatsOnStage* [online] 9 Dec. available from < [https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/matthew-bourne-interview-sleeping-beauty\\_39305.html](https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/matthew-bourne-interview-sleeping-beauty_39305.html) > [20 August 2018]
- <sup>19</sup> Thomas, H. (2003) *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory*. Basingstoke: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 123
- <sup>20</sup> See: <https://dorishumphreyfoundationuk.co.uk/the-humphrey-legacy-today/> and Main, L. (2012) *Directing the Dance Legacy of Doris Humphrey: The Creative Impulse of Reconstruction*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 41-51
- <sup>21</sup> See: Martin, C. (2000) 'After the Event: Reconstructing Ashton's Past' in *Preservation Politics: Dance Revived, Reconstructed, Remade*. ed. by Jordan, S. London: Dance Books, 41
- <sup>22</sup> Schneider, R. (2001) 'Performance Remains', *Performance Research*. 6 (2), 100
- <sup>23</sup> Parfitt, C. (2014) "Like a butterfly under glass": the cancan, Loïe Fuller and cinema'. *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 5 (2-3) 111
- <sup>24</sup> Dika, V. (2016) 'Remaking the Serpentine Dance: Film as Material/Body as Trace', *Millennium Film Journal*. 64, 34
- <sup>25</sup> Another reference for reconstructed dance activity is dance historian Millicent Hodson and art historian Kenneth Archer's work with recreating Nijinsky's (and other Ballet Russes choreographers) choreography. Their work, although thoroughly researched and attentive to evidence, has been criticised for its exaggeration, haphazardness and relatability in a different space and time to the original, thus highlighting the tensions and complexity of dance reconstruction. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/05/07/the-lost-nijinsky>
- <sup>26</sup> Phelan, P. (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Abingdon: Routledge, 146
- <sup>27</sup> In the 2014 interview article between Phelan and Smith, Phelan explains, 'If I can paraphrase myself reasonably successfully, 'performance betrays its ontology to the degree to which it participates in the economy of reproduction.' That's not exactly it, but it's close. This word 'betrays' has been a bit of a problem. I think I was read as a high priest saying 'we must not have betrayal!' I understand that we live with betrayals of all kinds. I was trying to point out what distinguishes performance, ontologically, from the photographic and recording arts. Performance's ephemeral nature, I was arguing, is absolutely powerful and can serve as a rejoinder to the 'preserve everything', 'purchase everything' mentality so central to the art world and to late capitalism more broadly.' in Phelan, P. and Smith, M. (2014) 'Performance, live culture and things of the heart', *journal of visual culture*. 2 (3), 294-295
- <sup>28</sup> Rebecca Schneider reframed this slighting in 2001, explaining that it suggests that performance becomes itself through its disappearance. Philip Auslander, in 2008, labelled Phelan's view as 'untenable', and proposed that the ontological distinctions between live and digitised (or mediatised) performances are blurred, suggesting that those who are fearful of live performance losing its value and worth strive to prove its distinctiveness in comparison to other performance formats.
- <sup>29</sup> Katrak, K. H. with Ratnam, A. (2017) 'Reenacting *Kaisika Natakam*'. in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*. ed. by Franko, M. New York: Oxford University Press, 323
- <sup>30</sup> Shakespeare, T. (2013) 'The Social Model of Disability'. in *The Disability Studies Reader*. ed. by Davis, L. London: Taylor and Francis, 197-198
- <sup>31</sup> Hughes, B. and Paterson, K. (1997) 'The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: towards a sociology of impairment', *Disability & Society*. 12 (3), 338
- <sup>32</sup> As explored in Doležel, L. (1988) 'Mimesis and Possible Worlds', *Poetics Today*. 9 (3)
- <sup>33</sup> Rasmussen, B. (2008) 'Beyond imitation and representation: extended comprehension of mimesis in drama education', *Research in Drama Education*, 13 (3), 312
- <sup>34</sup> Reason, M. (2004) 'Still Moving: The Revelation or Representation of Dance in Still Photography', *Dance Research Journal*. 35 (2) and 36 (1)
- <sup>35</sup> Mitchell, W. J. (1995) 'Representation'. in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. ed. by Lentricchia, F. and McLaughlin, T. London: University of Chicago Press
- <sup>36</sup> This has been more recently discussed in relation to Sally Field's casting as a mute woman in *The Shape of Water*, Bryan Cranston playing a quadriplegic man in *The Upside* and also Maddie Ziegler playing a woman with autism in Sia's film, *Music*, to name only a few. This phenomena of a non-disabled actor playing a disabled character has been labelled as the process of 'cripping up', a term coined by disability scholar and journalist Frances Ryan.
- <sup>37</sup> Grue, J. (2015) *Disability and Discourse Analysis*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 109
- <sup>38</sup> Garland-Thomson, R. (2013) 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory' in *The Disabilities Studies Reader*. 4th edn. ed. by Davis, L. Abingdon: Routledge, 339
- <sup>39</sup> in Jackson, D., Hodges, C. E. M., Molesworth, M. and Scullion, R. (Eds.) (2015) *Reframing Disability?: Media, (Dis)Empowerment, and Voice in the 2012 Paralympics*. New York: Routledge
- <sup>40</sup> Zanger, A. (2006) *Film Remakes as Ritual and Disguise*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 16
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 13



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<sup>42</sup> Whatley, S. (2018) '11 Million Reasons: Transmitting Inclusion in Dance'. in *A World of Muscle, Bone & Organs: Research & Scholarship in Dance*. ed. by Ellis, S., Blades H. and Waelde, C. Coventry: C-DaRE, 175

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 174

<sup>44</sup> Barnes, C. (1992) *Disabling Imagery and the Media: An Exploration of the Principles for Media Representations of Disabled People*. Halifax: The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, 19

<sup>45</sup> Franko, M. (2017) *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 7

<sup>46</sup> Cooper Albright, A. (2010) 'Moving Across Difference: Dance and Disability'. in *Choreographing Difference*. 2nd edn. ed. by Albright, A. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 58

<sup>47</sup> Discussions on Twitter demonstrate this area of contention, such as 'Someone explain to me why academia still uses dis/ability? Is there a way it is not offensive that I'm not aware of?' (link to conversation:

[https://twitter.com/a\\_h\\_reaume/status/1460785794600169475](https://twitter.com/a_h_reaume/status/1460785794600169475)) and 'Why do people write "dis/abled" instead of "disabled?" I don't get it and it makes me uncomfortable. Can someone please explain?' (link to conversation:

<https://twitter.com/DisabledDoctor/status/1458206819969642499>.

<sup>48</sup> Bentolhoda Mousavi, S., Lecic-Tosevski, D., Khalili, H. and Zeinab Mousavi, S. (2020) 'To be able, or disable, that is the question: A critical discussion on how language affects the stigma and self-determination in people with parability', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. 66 (5), 426

<sup>49</sup> Pepper, P. (2016) 'We've had all the insults. Now we're reclaiming the language of disability'. *The Guardian* [online] 22 Nov. available from < <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/22/language-of-disability-stereotypes-disabled-people> > [26 Nov 2021]

<sup>50</sup> Constructivism is used here to reflect the notion that people construct their own understanding of the world and that this understanding is liable to change and adapt through our own mental capacity, through experiences, thoughts and ideas

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