



Embodied Mobility and Emotional Movement

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Interviewer: Arseli Dokumaci

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Danielle is a Trudeau and Vanier Scholar, and a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. She builds genealogical and autoethnographic research through academic articles, film, dance, performance, and other activist-oriented practices. Danielle's doctoral project, *Spectacular Tolerance*, traces the inspirationalization of disability in Canada, and is partially informed by her own experiences as a Paralympic athlete. Danielle's work seeks to complicate and crip the artistic, activist and athletic worlds we imagine as most natural or benevolent, and collaboratively engages with how we might do and become otherwise.

Lindsay researches through integrated dance with artists who experience disability or other forms of marginalization, and their artistic and political allies. She is a choreographer, dancer, filmmaker, and the co-founder and Artistic Director of CRIPSiE (Collaborative Radically Integrated Performers Society in Edmonton). Her artistic and research interests emerge from her passion for dance, her embodied and political experiences of mental illness, her training as an occupational therapist, and her involvement in communities of activism, anti-oppression, and social justice. Lindsay is a Vanier scholar and PhD student in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta.

When did you first become involved with mobilities research?

DP: About six months ago, when we were asked to do this talk (May 2013) – officially. I think in some ways, we've both been doing mobilities research for some time but we might not have had that name for it. My work has touched on the theme of mobility for six or seven years.

LE: I'd say, very similar to Danielle. My work looks at dance. There is something really embodied about the idea of movement and also looking at the ways we might use dance for social mobility and political mobilization, which is partly what our talk is about as well. So, we might be kind of tangential but we certainly have some relation to the field.

What does mobilities mean to you?

DP: For me, I think it's come to mean – embodied. This is a really good word used by Lindsay. For me, mobilities is a very embodied thing. It's about your capacity to physically move within a space. As a chair user, I think that's always the first thing that comes to mind with mobility – all the places I can't go. But I think it's also about the affect of the embodied self and the tools I use and how these affect my social mobility. For example my opportunities to connect with people, to go to public spaces, to go to queer bars, to access queer culture. And also the possibility for political mobilization: the transaction of movements in the broader sense. Mobilities is about how those things intersect and how certain kinds of tools for physical mobility can really effect our opportunities for social or political mobility.

LE: I think mobilities can also extend to emotional movement and the capacities for communities to move each other and the capacity for a community to be moved, by collaboration and movement itself.

How do you use mobilities in your research?

DP: My work is really on social justice movements in Canada – ones that relate to disability but are not necessarily central to disability. I particularly relate that to Paralympic movements and disability sport. I am interested in the cultural movements, this “health” movement, aimed at “moving” disabled bodies in particular ways. It has had very important impacts, not always positive, on the political mobilization of disability in Canada. I’m really interested in how those kinds of things trade off. On the one hand, communities of physical mobility could potentially, or have historically, been pockets of political mobilization but, in the larger discourse of “getting bodies moving”, (this discourse) has actually been really detrimental to disability communities and political movements.

LE: For myself, I think I work with mobilities in my research in that the research that I am doing right now is on integrated dance communities. We are looking at creating movement together, for people of all abilities, and the ways that that exploration of movement can create and demonstrate different kinds of relationships of people through space and the ways that our movement as a community, in terms of dance, may also create social movement.

How does the relationship between bodies and tools inform your research?

DP: For me, it’s sometimes hard to distinguish between my art, my research, and my life. I think the answer for the one is often, also, the answer for the other, which is, I think my particular embodiment where I use multiple tools based on the kinds of

mobilizations around me, the kinds of things I want to do, the kinds of aesthetics or qualities of movements I am trying to get across in my art but also physical space or how I am feeling, or what looks good with my tie.

I think there is always an articulation or disarticulation of particular tools and bodies. Such that, I am not sure that one can always determine what exactly is a tool and what exactly is a body. I think, there's really something about that relationship which can help us think really differently about disability in general and the ways we see it. A great example of that is, when I have trouble breathing, the "tool" I use for that is that I often lay down and Lindsay will manually move my breath through my ribs. We think of breathing as the essential movement of life, the identifying moment of you being a human worthy of rights, in some ways. So the idea that you would have a tool to do that (which challenges where life begins and ends) but also that that "tool" could be a person and she could be moved in some ways from that same relationship. So, I think I am trying to queer or crip that idea of that tool-body distinction.

LE: And I think my perspective feeds into Danielle's in that my body might be read as "able" or as "not using tools" and it's particularly that invisibilizing of the tools of ablebodiedness – the tools that we use everyday that might make us unreadable as disabled – that help create a divide or an imaginary notion that there is a distinction between certain kinds of people.

Living with mental illness, there are many tools that I use that might actually hide or invisibilize my experiences of disability. At the same time, these are also tools that are

widely used to mark ablebodiedness in a sense that they create the possibility of distancing us from disability because we do not read them as tools. So, if I am using make-up or coffee to be able to navigate my world, these tools might be read as tools of ablebodiedness, but they are not that different from some of the tools you might read as those of disability. And so, looking at bodies and tools and questioning what tools we read with what frames or lenses and, also, how those create certain kinds of people and the stories that uphold those distinctions I think is something we want to challenge with our work. My experience and Danielle's experience, our coming together, creates that possibility.

How do you use dance to engage with issues in critical disability studies?

DP: Two really important questions within critical disability studies, are *who is speaking* and *to whom are we speaking?* Knowing how few people who experience disability are actually in academia, it's actually really crucial for me that my research engages undergraduates, engages across my field but also engages outside of academia in ways that are accessible. I mean accessible in the sense of people actually being able to get to a point to access it but also accessible in the sense that you don't need to have read PhD level theory to be able to understand the sentiments. So I often translate my research into film that doesn't actually speak the research language. What I've found from doing that is people who aren't in the PhD program have much better engagement with the critical tools of, let's say, critical disability studies than most PhD people I know – it's lived in their lives and it doesn't seem that odd for them. For me, film is a way to politically engage but also engage outside of academia.

LE: Drawing on what Danielle said, I think that movement, without words, is a really evocative way to both know – so that knowledge is generated from your body and from the way that your body moves – but also that there's a capacity for our dancers, who may not use English language in some of the ways we expect or demand people to, have a brilliant capacity to communicate things that I am not sure anybody can communicate in English language. Dance is a really incredible medium to know and be known.