

IntegrART Symposium 2019 – Panel discussion “The Way You Look (at me)
Tonight: Moving Perspective”

Dr Colette Conroy

Access = love: a response to *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight*.

I realised the other day that I haven't seen a piece of dance that isn't disability dance for many years. Do non-disabled people make dance? What is that like, I wonder? I feel excited to be part of a richly layered culture where there is citation of figures like Bill Shannon and Simi Linton, where I recognise ideas presented anew and embodied by new individuals to a new audience.

The bold statement 'this is access' at the end of this performance opens up a subtle and completely convincing way of thinking about access. In this scenario, access is very like the political notion of recognition, the three-part structure of love, esteem and respect. In brief, love is the process of recognising the individual's simultaneous difference from and dependence on another. It involves infantile experiences of parenting, but also experiences of friendship and romantic love. Respect is the acknowledgement of the potential that the other has to pursue her or his own objectives and goals. Esteem is the process of earning the approval of society through socially esteemed activities or contributions.

What is most interesting to me is the way that the performers discuss the way that misrecognition hurts whilst also making it clear that this space is one of perfect recognition. Imagine that it is 1982. A disabled performer walks or wheels onto the stage. It is political – he claims a space and embodies a struggle for the power over and ownership of this space. Or it is 2019 and perhaps a disabled performer walks or wheels onto the stage. Perhaps the space already belongs to her, and the performer has to do something else - a trapeze act? - in order to make any kind of comparable political impression. This impression previously might have called politics, but now retrospectively may seem to be artistic novelty. The same body has different meanings in different contexts and in both the aesthetic effect is comes from the way the performer deals with the anticipated expectations about bodies and abilities.

There is a historical perspective to talking about access. I was there in the infancy of access-aesthetics, and I would say that Access isn't a product, it is a process. I went through a gloomy patch a few years ago of thinking “but we talked about this 10 years ago”. But I realise that this doesn't matter. Different people, different circumstances. This is why the history is history, and access is ready to be renegotiated anew, with confidence by the people who are in the room.

Access isn't about opening a door to a room that already exists, it is about full recognition and engagement. It will, inevitably change how we think about art forms. So, my starting point is a big 'yes' to the assertion of this wonderful piece of performance. **Yes, access is like love** in that it exists only through encounters between people in specific circumstances.

Colette Conroy, Zurich, 3rd May 2019.