

I'm Kimberly Harvey, I am a mixed-race woman in my mid-30s, I have short curly fake red hair and I'm wearing glasses and right now. When you see me I will be in a blue manual wheelchair. I am an independent disabled Dance artist and for me that means I'm a performer a choreographer and a teacher. I have my own inclusive dance company, Subtle Kraft Co. and I'm currently the director of the youth dance program for Candoco Dance Company. As you probably realized by now this year's Symposium is all about questioning and embracing a sense of curiosity and I'm going to begin that process here and now by asking you, what do you see when you look at me or what is the first thing that comes to mind when you think back to the audio description of myself that I just gave? This might seem a strange or upfront question to ask you so early on and I promise I'm not doing it to be confrontational or to catch you out and please don't worry you won't have to tell me your answers but I'm doing it for a reason. And this is just to acknowledge those initial thoughts or impressions that we all naturally have all the time. Maybe it came to mind that I am a woman or that I'm speaking with an English accent. Did you think of me as a woman or was I a disabled person or both but which came first? I'm guessing that the fact that I have a disability stuck in your mind and the wheelchair that's a pretty pretty big visual identifier. It is often a main one when they think of me and I imagine other visibly disabled people however personally for me it is one of many parts of who I am. Perhaps you had some thoughts around the type of person I am, where did my

profession come in?

Did you think of me as a dancer? I'm going to show you a short extract from a dance film from Subtle Kraft Co. that I created at the end of 2019

pre-covid in collaboration with Irish actor Mark Fitzgerald the film's code between and almost it's a duet film that explores the intricacies in evolving nature of Human Relationships through the nuances of non-verbal communication we're guided by the camera

but what is it that you see this duet film is shot in black and white with two performers. Mark (he/him) is fair-skinned with light eyes and a beard in contrast to Kimberly who her dark hair and dark eyes, she's sometimes wearing glasses and sometimes not.

The video plays: he drops down to lying beside her, they play a game in the space between them fingers advancing towards each other or retracting lying in different positions.

Faces in profile, one above the other, below a long Blink, push arms like over one another.

He leans back his head on her lap, His arm drops and she catches his elbow, A soft touch.

[Music]

What did you see when you watched that?

What didn't you see?

What comes to mind when you think of me now?

Has your perception of me changed?

if you hadn't heard me say at the

beginning that I was disabled, would you know this by looking at the film?

Does that matter?

So I first took part in a contemporary dance workshop at the age of 12.

It was with Candoco Dance Company and it was in a context with disabled and non-disabled young people

as a professional Dance Company of disabled and non-disabled dancers this

diversity was also present in the teaching team that were delivering the workshop and that would be the same now actually. But as a young person back then I didn't know dance environments like this could and did exist.

Yes I've been to see performances and I'd been lucky enough to be taken to the theatre, to have seen ballet on stage but until that point nothing in society had shown me that the Arts let alone the professional Dance World could include or value someone with a different physicality or disability and value them as a Dance artist or performer.

That visibility that opportunity to become one of those young dancers in Candoco Dance Company 22 years ago shifted and opened my perceptions to what was possible. I genuinely came out of that week-long residency saying when I grow up I want to be a dancer.

As far as training goes I trained in a non-traditional way in the sense that I didn't go to a conservatoire.

I auditioned but I didn't get in and I didn't do a dance degree

I realized once I was there the university definitely wasn't for me.

I trained through various learning programs with Candoco through going to different mainstream technique classes, workshops residencies with different companies and by taking part in different performance projects with different artists.

This bespoke or on-the-job approach to training was the right choice for me by a million miles but I would be lying if I didn't tell you that for the first few years of working I did consider myself less of a dancer or not as good

and that was because I hadn't gone down that traditional route.

Of course I don't believe that now.

And then my job with Candoco I'm often

working with young disabled people and reaffirming and supporting them to find their own way to gain more experience or train in dance in their own way. It is not always easy to figure out your own progression route or training pathway if you aren't doing it the traditional way and disabled dancers need support to do this and they need that from dance organizations and dance professionals with passion, knowledge and experience of what it can mean to work inclusively.

I do identify as disabled and yes part of my disability means that my legs don't work, as well as other things.

We have that very visual cue in the fact that I use a wheelchair but it is one part of my identity. Disability is nuanced and it is individual and that's the way I see my disability.

Somebody else will see it differently.

As an adult I am becoming increasingly aware of the systematic ableism within our society and how I as a disabled person have been affected by it.

I'm always quite shocked when I think back

to me as a child and realize the unquestionable ableist views that I held then,

wanting to be like when non-disabled peers, wanting to do things the way they did them. I thought that was the right way that was what I inspired to and what I measured myself against. My disability was something I managed and it was never part of my identity that I would have considered celebrating.

I don't consider my disability something to be managed anymore.

I see it as a part of me to work with, to learn more about to understand and be curious about.

You can't tell everything about a person just by looking at them. You won't be able to see everything and I don't just mean in terms of understanding whether somebody has a disability, whether it's

visible or invisible. Just because you don't know something you need to ask is it your place?

Why do you need to know?

When is it appropriate to ask certain questions or might you learn more about the person just by being with them, by dancing with them, getting to know them and then get getting to know you? As human beings, what we need, what we like, what we don't like, how we express ourselves all with our own individual interweaving layers complexities and contradictions.