Shifting boundaries, shifting aesthetics; intersecting dance, disability and law.

Despite the notable impact on the dance scene in the UK by a small number of disabled dance artists, they and their creative outputs remain at the margins of professional dance practice. This presentation will examine the conditions that support the work of disabled dance artists and in particular the aesthetic and legal frameworks that acknowledge (or otherwise) their vital contribution to our cultural landscape. By looking at the work made by British artists Caroline Bowditch, Claire Cunningham and Marc Brew, we will ask questions about ownership, authorship and agency and how their work reflects back on the routes to the dance profession for disabled dance artists, and in turn how their presence within the mainstream dance environment questions the aesthetic values that take root in professional dance practice. We will also ask what impact the work of disabled dancers within professional practice has on the broader disability arts movement. Our presentation will itself be rooted in an AHRC-funded project, recently started, that brings together researchers in dance, medical law, human rights law and intellectual property law in the UK and Australia to ask a number of questions about the working methods and experiences of disabled dance artists. Working directly with Caroline Bowditch, the project will examine how legal frameworks support or hinder the participation of disabled artists in mainstream performance. Our presentation will discuss our early findings to show how the intersection of dance and law brings fresh insights to questions about how we critically engage with disabled dance, how we value work and how it is valued by others.

The presentation is a joint presentation by Sarah Whatley, Charlotte Waelde, Abbe Brown and Shawn Harmon.