

Between image and action, or: why a Disability Film Festival?

In our Western culture, images are everywhere. We are constantly confronted with images in the newspaper, on television, on social media: pictures being shared, video's being posted, cartoons being liked, life-size posters being hung up on the façades of houses, etc. Whether you want to be a part of it or not, everybody contributes to and shares in our contemporary visual culture. The public often assumes that these visual representations are innocent, that they are nothing more than a representation of the world as it is. The origin of this idea can be traced back to the introduction of photography at the start of the nineteenth century. It rests on the assumption that the image does not add anything, does not demand any work on the part of the viewer or from the person or object that is depicted. But nothing could be further from the truth.

The way in which people and objects are depicted is never neutral. The image asks the spectator to behave a certain way, to have certain ideas and beliefs about what is depicted. This is especially true for people with a disability. Disabled people, like others, often get portrayed – or rather not portrayed. The way in which their lives are pictured often reveals a certain belief system about the value of a disabled life. These value judgements differ greatly, ranging from disabled people getting portrayed as sad, needy, dependent individuals, to them being presented as exotic objects to marvel at. Each of these representations affects, be it unconsciously, the thoughts and actions of the person looking at the representation, leading to specific belief systems considering and behavioural patterns towards disabled people.

It is this connection between the image and our actions/thoughts that motivated us to make the image the centre of discussion. Whether its newspaper illustrations, shared and retweeted clips, characters in popular television documentaries or – in our case – main character in movies, it is essential to be mindful of the direction the image is steering us in, what it demands from us and how we can react.