

2023 Call for Papers and Panels

Disability in Theatre and Performance

Instead of a standard call for papers, this year ATHE has instead issued a call to action, specifically a call to resist a return to “normal,” pre-pandemic models of working, teaching, and learning; to build more equitable, empathetic theatre practices; and to center the voices of historically marginalized groups. This call, titled “Building From the Rubble,” provides an opportunity for ATHE members to begin working towards a better, more inclusive future for academic theatre. However, change is not necessarily improvement; before we leap into action, perhaps we might take a moment, a breath, to consider, as DTaP co-founder and current Chair Dr. Katya Vrtis asked, “If everything is rubble, how do the crips get in?” Furthermore, underneath those piles of rubble, what foundations still remain in place? Without explicitly grappling with the many underlying assumptions and ideologies built into those foundations, how do we risk rebuilding in a way that continues to exclude those most marginalized from the field?

Even as the pandemic forced millions of people into “Crip Time,” the world was nevertheless bombarded with an ableist and eugenic rhetoric that painted disabled and immunocompromised individuals as disposable, a group worth sacrificing in the name of returning to work and social gatherings. This rhetoric reflects longstanding cultural narratives that paint disabled individuals as unworthy, unproductive, and valueless members of society. Despite the strides in DEI work in the performing arts and higher education, these ideologies too often persist in academic and theatrical spaces, as can be seen in inaccessible classrooms, rehearsal halls, shops, and stages; the maintenance of academic habits like inflexible due dates and attendance policies, requirements of doctors notes or other “proof” of disability that deny the agency and expertise of the individual in question on their own lived experience, and unwillingness to provide materials in alternative forms - for example via audio description or formatted to function with screen readers; in habits of physical and vocal training that encourages mimicry of disability based on ableist stereotypes, and through the erasure of actual disabled people; and in season selection and casting that fails to consider the most important rule of disability representation: “nothing about us without us.”

Furthermore, overlooking disability in DEI efforts fails to acknowledge the ways that ableism, white supremacy, cisheteronormativity, and colonialism are deeply intertwined and, indeed, perpetuate one another. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha reminds us in her book *Care Work*, Disability Justice frameworks were developed by Black,

Indigenous, and people of color, and that “disabled Black and brown creators face a specific invisibilization and erasure of our political and cultural work.” Disability Justice is intersectional and anti-capitalist, committed to sustainability, interdependence, and collective access as a path to collective liberation. It asks, as Piepzna-Samarasinha puts it, “How do we move together as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the orientation spectrum—where no body/mind is left behind?” (2018).

The Disability in Theatre and Performance collective (DTaP) is seeking panels, papers, personal essays, manifestos, workshops, autoethnographies, performances, interviews, and projects that explore the notion of disability within art, that reframe the disabled experience not as rubble to be discarded, but as foundational to human experience and artistic practice. We invite big questions, thoughts-in-process, imperfectly crippled modes of presentation and creation, and more.

Possible Topics for Exploration

- How can crip epistemologies - wisdom, knowledge, skills, lived experience, etc - benefit the field as a whole? What would a theatre, a classroom, a conference that values crip wisdom, poetics, and aesthetics look like?
- How can models of equity and inclusion informed by disability studies and crip theory be in conversation with antiracist, decolonial, feminist, queer, or other theatrical practices? What models counter elements of white supremacy culture and ableism in both academia and the theatre industry? What models emphasize slow intentionality as opposed to urgency, embodied knowledge as opposed to “objective” and detached rationality, and/or interdependence over individualism?
- How do we identify and counter the forces pushing disabled artists and scholars out of the field? What changes does the field need to make to become a community that disabled artists, teachers, and scholars are able to work in and want to be a part of in the long term?
- How can we unpack the ways in which racism, misogyny, heterocissexism, and other forms of bigotry are disabling on a systemic level? How can an understanding of debility v. disability inform how we address the root causes of these interlocking systems in theatre and higher education?
- How do we maintain intersectionality while creating artistic and educational spaces and works that center disabled voices?

- In what ways can we reimagine and restage the myriad of plays, classical and contemporary, that contain harmful and stereotypical notions of disability? Can such works ever be part of a crip-friendly future?
- As digital theatre is gaining popularity, what can we learn from the digital aesthetics of online intersectional disability-led arts communities (i.e. cripplepunk, glitch feminism, crip technoscience)? How can adaptive and assistive technology further the performing arts as a whole?
- ATHE's conference will have both virtual and in-person elements. How can we lean in to the aesthetics and capabilities of each of these formats to create the most accessible, supportive, and efficacious spaces? How might Mia Mingus's philosophy of access intimacy help in creating those spaces, at ATHE and beyond?
- How might the social, identity, and other models of disability and their focus on community create better approaches to access and accommodation than those which rely on the medical model of disability and its focus on individual debility? What tensions arise in that shift?
- Referencing the work of Robert Mcruer, disabled scholar and choreographer, Elisabeth Motley notes that the future "cannot be innocent" because "it already carries rhetorics of beauty and order that are normative." How then, can we begin building? What steps must be taken for us to challenge the normatively-imagined future of our field?

Submission Instructions

Email proposals to allisonbackus12@gmail.com and nicolasshannonsavard@gmail.com by Dec. 1, 2022.

Submissions should include:

- Title of the session or individual presentation
- Presenter name(s), email, and institutional affiliation (if applicable)
- Written or video summary of purpose and topics to be addressed in the session
- Presentation format (i.e. paper, panel, virtual workshop, in-person performance, etc.)
- Approximate length of presentation (ATHE sessions typically run 90 minutes with groups of 3-4 presentations)

For transparency, the conference planners will evaluate proposals for clarity of objectives, inclusion, relevance, and potential connections to the work of other ATHE Focus Groups. Full description of ATHE Session Selection Guidelines [here](#).