

**Call for Papers: Disability Performance Histories**  
**A Special Section of *Theatre History Studies***  
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**Co-Editors: Patrick McKelvey and Samuel Yates**

In 2010, Susan Schweik observed that “with the notable exception of histories of the freak show, work in disability performance studies tends to focus on contemporary examples.”<sup>1</sup> Fifteen years later, the field’s historiographic impulses hardly seem as settled as they once were. Recent and forthcoming monographs continue to reshape this landscape: in early modern disability performance histories—Katherine Schaap Williams’s *Unfixable Forms*; nineteenth-century disability performance histories—Dennis Tyler’s *Disabilities of the Color Line* and Camille Owens’s *Like Children*; and postwar disability performance histories—Patrick McKelvey’s *Disability Works* and Will Kanyusik’s *The Illegible Man*.<sup>2</sup> In combination with ongoing investigations into the disability histories of modern drama by Aleksei Grinenko, Kirsty Johnston, and Hannah Simpson, these are just a few examples of the arrival of more varied and robust disability performance histories that were unimaginable even a decade ago.<sup>3</sup> The breadth and depth of these contributions notwithstanding, one would be hard-pressed to contest the idea that certain forms of presentism don’t shape the contours, commitments, and methods that structure the ever-growing field of disability theatre and performance studies—despite calls by some of our field’s founders for historical interventions.<sup>4</sup>

The reasons for this overwhelmingly contemporary orientation are multiple: flourishing twenty-first-century disability arts and culture movements that rightly demand our critical attention; the imperative contributions of artist-scholars in the field whose interventions necessarily require that they document and theorize their own artistic practices; the access barriers that accompany archival research and travel; purposeful and unconscious elisions of disability and crip/queer bodyminds from archives and finding aids alike; inadequate institutional support for disability scholarship; and uneven effects of an increasingly precarious profession on disabled scholars, all intensified by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; and the broader co-constitution of anti-theatricality and anti-historicism that continues to inflect theatre and performance research.

And yet, the editors of this special section suspect another factor may be at play: the continued and pervasive separation and policing of disciplinary methodologies through rubrics of “legibility” and institutional bureaucracies, resulting in inadequate dialogue between the fields of disability theatre and performance research and disability history. This results in a pronounced lack of opportunities to reflect on the historical and historiographic assumptions, commitments, and opportunities internal to the field of disability theatre and performance research, and diminishing opportunities for disability historians to learn from theatre and performance theory and historiography. Structuring absences like these are perhaps all the more surprising in light of how the broader field of disability history continues to flourish, including histories of access and design (Bess Williamson’s *Accessible America*; Aimi Hamraie’s *Building Access*); Sami Schalk’s invitation to examine forms of disability activism that unfolded beyond the norms and practices of white-majority disability rights movements (*Black Disability Politics*); Sari Altschuler’s theorization of “historical cripistemology” to foreground crip ways of historical knowing; and Jennifer Barclay and Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy’s provocation for disability scholars to begin “cripping the archive.”<sup>5</sup> The tension between these disciplinary developments is an invitation to revive and reassess the historical and historiographic commitments that have long governed disability performance research, such as Petra Kuppers’s deployment of queer historiography to build performance practices that “touch history for crip culture.”<sup>6</sup>

This special issue takes as its project the advancement of historical methods in disability theatre and performance research and the critical appraisal of the historiographic norms of research in the field to date. Potential topics might include:

- Disability histories of global theatre and performance practices
- Histories of global disability performance cultures
- Institutional histories of disability performance research in and beyond the academy
- Histories of disability arts and policy, political economy, philanthropy, and grantmaking
- Disability histories of the Black Arts Movement
- Crip historicism and/or crip historiography in performance research
- Histories of disability aesthetics in canonical and classical theatrical forms
- Histories of (in)accessibility in theatre and performance
- The history of disability theatre and performance studies' formation as a field
- Disability performance politics unmoored from white-majority disability rights activism
- Theatre and performance as crip archives
- Historical cripistemologies of theatre and performance
- Critical convivialities of crip, queer, and trans theatre and performance historiography
- Teaching disability in theatre and performance history classrooms

Contributions that examine these topics with attention to race, gender, sexuality, indigeneity, and class, and/or reconfigure the geographic contours of disability theatre and performance research, particularly with respect to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, including diasporic histories, are especially welcome.

We are particularly interested in traditional scholarly essays of 7,000-9,000 words (including notes), but if you have an idea for an alternative format, please inquire with the editors. Please send all manuscripts and inquiries to [disabilityperformancehistories@gmail.com](mailto:disabilityperformancehistories@gmail.com) by January 1, 2025.

*Theatre History Studies* is the official journal of the Mid-America Theatre Conference and is published by the University of Alabama Press. Since 1981, *Theatre History Studies* has provided critical, analytical, and descriptive articles on all aspects of theatre history. The journal is devoted to disseminating the highest quality scholarly endeavors to promote understanding and discovery of world theatre history. Essays for the general section should be between 6,000-8,000 words and use endnotes rather than footnotes. Submissions in alternate formats will be considered on an individual basis. Illustrations are encouraged. Manuscripts should be prepared in conformity with the guidelines in the *Chicago Manual of Style* and the University of Alabama Press style sheet located on the MATC website ([here](#)).

*Theatre History Studies* accepts submissions for its general section on the full range of topics in theatre history on a rolling deadline. Please send manuscripts for the general section to: Jocelyn L. Buckner, Editor, at [ths.editor@matc.us](mailto:ths.editor@matc.us).

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Schweik, “Marshall P. Wilder and Disability Performance History.” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 30, nos. 3-4 (2010), np.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Schaap Williams, *Unfixable Forms: Disability, Performance, and the Early Modern English Theater*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021. Dennis Tyler, *Disabilities of the Color Line*. New York: New York University Press, 2022. Camille Owens, *Like Children: Black Prodigy and the Measure of the Human in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2024. Patrick McKelvey, *Disability Works: Performance After Rehabilitation*. New York: New York University Press, 2024. Will Kanyusik, *The Illegible Man: Disability and Masculinity in Twentieth Century America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Aleksei Grinenko, *Seriously Mad: Mental Distress and the Broadway Musical*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023. Kirsty Johnston, *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama: Recasting Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016. Hannah Simpson, *Samuel Beckett and Disability Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Ann M. Fox and Carrie Sandahl, “‘Frenemies’ of the Canon: Our Two Decades of Studying and Teaching Disability in Drama and Performance.” In *Troubling Traditions: Canonicity, Theatre, and Performance in the US*, edited by Lindsey Mantoan, Matthew Moore, and Angela Farr Schiller, 147-160. New York: Routledge, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Bess Williamson, *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design*. New York: New York University Press, 2020. Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Sami Schalk, *Black Disability Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022. Sari Altschuler, “Touching *The Scarlet Letter*: What Disability History Can Teach Us about Literature.” *American Literature* 92, no. 1 (2020), 91-122. Jennifer Barclay and Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy, *Crippling the Archive: Disability, History, and Power* (edited collection in progress).

<sup>6</sup> Petra Kupperts, *Disability Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. Pp. 154.