

# DIS/ABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

*Jun.-Prof. Dr. Benjamin Wihstutz*

The seminar will offer students an in-depth exploration of the interdisciplinary field of Dis/ability and Performance Studies. Leveraging insights from historical and theoretical research conducted at the Collaborative Research Center "Studies in Human Differentiation" (SFB 1482 *Humandifferenzierung*) at Mainz University, supported by the DFG (German Research Foundation), **Professor Benjamin Wihstutz** will present a pioneering perspective on dis/ability within the context of the performing arts.

Central to this perspective is the understanding of dis/ability as a multifaceted human condition and identity shaped by societal barriers, individual predispositions, and the enactment of norms and "restored behaviors" (Schechner) in everyday life. The term "dis/ability performance" thus encapsulates both the **creative output of disabled artists** and the **broader tension between ableist expectations and the realities of disability**. The seminar will introduce different "models" of dis/ability and refer to the historical transformation of dis/ability as an anthropological concept as well as to new approaches on dis/ability in the performing arts.

The seminar will therefore be structured around three primary objectives: firstly, to introduce students to **key concepts in critical disability studies and crip theory**; secondly, to explore the **issues of dis/ability and accessibility in theater and cultural events**; and thirdly, to **analyze and discuss works by internationally renowned disability artists** who address these critical questions – among them world-renowned choreographers and dancers like Claire Cunningham (Glasgow) or Angela Alves (Berlin), mixed-abled theatre ensembles such as Theater HORA (Zurich) or Meine Damen und Herren (Hamburg), or Performance teams such as Criptonite (Zurich) and Tourette's Hero (London). The discussion of these examples, that will expressively foster students' participation, will be theoretically framed within innovative works in Dis/ability and Performance Studies, encompassing critical phenomenological approaches to spatial and temporal perceptions – including concepts like "crip time" (Kafer; Samuels) and "crip spacetime" (Price) –praxeological and materialist interpretations of ableism and discrimination, and fresh insights into Disability Aesthetics (Siebers; Sandahls).

Furthermore, the seminar will examine the concept of "cripping the arts", offering a transformative lens through which to understand theatrical expression. Through the different examples that will be shown through video samples, the seminar will investigate the **aesthetic and political dimensions of inclusive or mixed-abled performances**, challenging fundamental norms related to ability, beauty, perfection, and productivity.

Engaging with texts from aesthetic theory, Disability Studies and Performance Studies, alongside analyses of relevant theater productions, the seminar will prompt critical reflection on the extent to which dis/ability constitutes a universal human condition from an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective, implicating all individuals regardless of their temporary able-bodied (TAB) status.