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. This team presentation will itself be rooted in an AHRC-funded collaborative 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. 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 how collaborations of this kind can contribute to ethical considerations of disabled dance practice and how this impacts on the dance artists’ work. This will include ethical considerations of the research team when working with disabled dance artists. As the project is working directly with Caroline Bowditch, we will examine how legal frameworks support or hinder the ethical 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.