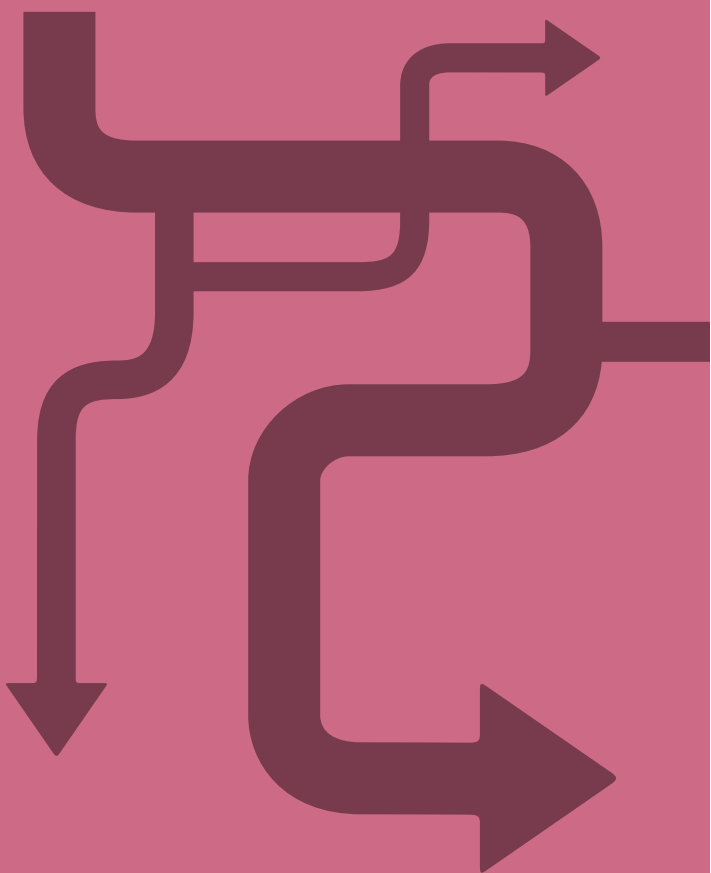


# MAS SYMPOSIUM

University of Zurich

25<sup>th</sup>–26<sup>th</sup> October 2013



**Enabling Disability  
and Processes of  
Learning**

While the understanding of disability in the social sciences and humanities has profoundly changed from biomedical perspectives regarding disability as a physical impairment to socio-cultural approaches, in which disability is perceived as a socially constructed barrier, the notion of bodily otherness still exists. This is not only the case for the understanding of people who are not involved in this debate, but also for many experts in applied sciences and people with disabilities themselves. Neither the so called social model nor the biomedical concepts offer a theoretical approach which allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of disability as well as of the human experience of people with disabilities.

Recent approaches point to the fact that thinking about disability and the body in general is still locked in the Cartesian dualism. Instead of separating the bodily and the social, human beings should be seen as holistic beings, thus the bodily and the social as well as the political are inseparably linked.

*“Anthropologists can show that the line dividing the social and the physiological is arbitrary, that no human action or morphological trait exists in a vacuum, and that human history is the conjunctural and emergent product of social, physiological, morphological, symbolic, and historical interactivities” (Fuentes, Agustin [2010]: Introduction. In: American Anthropologist, Vol. 112 [4], p. 512).*

This approach demands a radical rethinking not only of the concepts of disability but also of the assumptions, beliefs, and ways researchers think, talk and write about disability.

Starting with the researcher’s understanding of human beings – as social as well as biological beings interacting in their environments – we will discuss perspectives of disability. Which insights can this paradigm provide for further research? In what ways can we talk about disability? And what implications do these new perspectives entail regarding methodological approaches?

In adopting a holistic understanding of processes of learning we focus on so called people with disabilities for two reasons: First, people with disabilities – however the categories are defined – are considered to be different, as not having the same capabilities people have in general. This idea focuses on the knowledge and skills an individual has but not on the processes of learning them.

Secondly, people with disabilities are part of every society – the 1st World Report on Disability (2011) states that nearly every human being will become disabled at one point during their life. Thus, disability cannot be seen as an exceptional condition but must be perceived as part of becoming human. Keeping disability in mind, we would like to discuss approaches and ideas regarding lifelong learning and appropriation of skills and/or knowledge as major processes of becoming human.

# SPEAKERS

**Penny Boyes Braem** is Founder and Director of the Center for Sign Language Research in Basel and has done studies of several aspects of Swiss German Sign Language and of hearing persons' gestures.

**Aigli Chatjoui** is Anthropologist and holds a research position at the Department of Anthropology and History at the University of Aegean.

**Alireza Darvishy** is Professor at the School of Engineering, Zurich University of Applied Sciences and head of the ICT-Accessibility Lab..

**Olga Meier-Popa** is Head of the Disability Office of the University of Zurich.

**Martin Meyer** is Professor of Psychology at the University of Zurich and Head of the Centre Neuroplasticity and Learning in Normal Aging.

**Herbert Muyinda** is Anthropologist and Lecturer at the Child Health and Development Centre of the Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

**Susan Reynolds Whyte** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen.

Friday, 25 October 2013

# Theoretical Implications

*Chair: Gitte Beckmann / Francesca Rickli*

11.30 – 12.30 Reception / Registration

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12.30 – 13.00 **Opening**

Mareile Flitsch (Head of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology / Director of the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich)

Piet van Eeuwijk (MAS SEG)

Gitte Beckmann (Organizing Team)

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13.00 – 14.00 **Chronic Conditions and the Sociality of Learning**

Susan Reynolds Whyte (Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen)

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14.00 – 15.00 **Disability, Skill and the Changing Sociality in Post-conflict Northern Uganda**

Herbert Muyinda (Child Health and Development Centre, Makerere University Kampala, Uganda)

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15.00 – 15.30 Coffee Break

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15.30 – 16.30 **The Biosocial Making of Thalassaemia. Negotiating Notions of Normality, Disability and Difference**

Aigli Chatjouli (Department of Anthropology and History, University of Aegean)

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16.30 – 17.30 **Functional Lateralization and Structural Asymmetries in the Signing Brain**

Martin Meyer (Department of Psychology, University of Zurich)

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17.30 – 18.00 **Synthesis / Conclusion**

Saturday, 26 October 2013

## Practical Implications

*Chair: Marie-Theres Schuler / Raphael Schwere / Piet van Eeuwijk*

09.00 – 09.30 Reception / Registration

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10.00 – 11.00 **Enabling Access to Higher Education for People with Disabilities**

Olga Meier-Popa (Disability Office, University of Zurich)

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11.00 – 12.00 **Information and Communication Technologies: Chances and Challenges for People with Disabilities**

Alireza Darvishy (School of Engineering, Zurich University of Applied Sciences)

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12.00 – 13.00 Lunch Buffet

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13.00 – 14.00 **How Signed Languages Enable**

Penny Boyes Braem (Center for Sign Language Research, Basel)

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14.00 – 15.00 **Closing Discussion**

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From 15.00 Aperitif

### Venue

University of Zurich, Kollegiengebäude / Main Building, Rämistrasse 71, Room KO2-F-175

### Language

English  
International Sign  
Ugandan Sign Language

### Symposium Fees

CHF 60.– Regular fee  
CHF 40.– SEG members  
CHF 20.– SEG students  
Payment on site.

# Organisation

**Gitte Beckmann**, MAS, ESZ/VMZ University of Zurich

**Piet van Eeuwijk**, MAS, ESZ University of Zurich

**Francesca Rickli**, ESZ University of Zurich

**Marie-Theres Schuler**, ESZ University of Zurich

**Raphael Schwere**, ESZ University of Zurich

Organized by Medical Anthropology Switzerland (MAS SEG), the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ESZ) and the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich (VMZ)

## Contact

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### MAS – MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY SWITZERLAND

*Interdisziplinäre Kommission für Medizinethnologie*

*Commission Interdisciplinaire d'Anthropologie Médicale*

*Commissione Interdisciplinare d'Antropologia Medica*

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