DOING DISABILITY DIFFERENTLY
in architectural education and practice

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The DIS/ORDINARY Architecture Project

“To promote activity that develops and captures models of new practice for the built environment, led by the creativity and experiences of disabled artists”
the problem...

Disability as a *fixed*, ahistorical and non-theoretical category

Dealt with at end of design process, as a *technical* and regulatory problem

‘Normal’ environments are *retrofitted* with ‘add-ons’ to make accessible to those who have already been excluded
Designing for disability without the application of brain or imagination often operating at the level of appearances.

Little creative or critical engagement with dis/ability in history, theory, technology, education or practice.

Continues to ignore disabled people’s considerable expertise in negotiating the built environment.
General attitudes to disabled people as ‘tragic’ and upsetting

An acceptance that it is okay to design ‘normal’ spaces first, with ‘special needs’ added afterwards

The invisibility of abled-bodied privilege

The tendency to treat access and inclusion as a marginal concern

The use of justificatory narratives to ‘explain away’ situations where access is poor
two big claims
1. Dis/ability is a creative generator

Start building and urban design *from* disability - from valuing the rich bio- and neurodiversity of different ways of being in the world.

Recognise that disabled people are already *creative experts* in negotiating the built environment.

Start from the perceptions and experiences of *misfits*, ‘unruly bodies’ and non-compliant bodies, not of norms or averages.
2. Dis/ability is a powerful critique of ‘what is normal’

Start from disability to *challenge* everyday social, material and spatial practices where these act to enable some whilst disabling others.

Start from disability to investigate how architectural and built environment education and practice perpetuates particular patterns of *inclusions & exclusions*, and find creative and critical ways to change these towards transformative social, material and spatial justice.
changing mindsets
us them
architects
able-bodied
active

clients and users
disabled
passive

us
self-contained
common sense
binary categories

them
architects
able-bodied
active
clients and users
disabled
passive

us
self-contained
common sense
binary categories
tem

caring for them
empathy for others
inclusive design
universal design
disabled access
architects
able-bodied
active

us

clients and users
disabled
passive

them

self-contained
common sense
binary categories

caring for them
empathy for others
inclusive design
universal design
disabled access
embodied, multitude of different ways of being in the world, inequitable practices

dis/ability

access as an emergent, complex, collective uneven and never finished process
embodied, multitude of different ways of being in the world, inequitable practices

**dis/ability**

interrogate assumptions about ability –ableism - as well as disability
recognise disabled people as built environment
creative experts
critically & creatively engage with where/how space acts to **disable** some and **enable** others
act towards transformative social, material and **spatial justice**
[L]anguage recommends that we conceive of the able-body as something that just comes along ‘naturally’ as people go about their daily existence.

(Titchkosky 2002: 103)

1. pay attention
Fit
Healthy
Autonomous
Independent
Attractive
Able-bodied
Youthful
Unencumbered
Mobile
Capable
Entrepreneurial
Thriving
Driven
Active
Social norms assume that our body-minds are *unproblematically capable*, mobile, unencumbered and autonomous, with no need for recourse to support.

This includes a norm of *uninterrupted and fast motion*, unimpeded by others or by built surroundings; supported by continuous visual, physical and mental agility; with high-speed, instinctive and independent processing of, and responses to, immediate experiences and changing circumstances.

This is underpinned by an unnoticed and boundless *fatigue-free energy*; imperviousness to others and/or frustration as others’ perceived slowness.
2. practice an embodied creative & professional practice
1% - people who are registered as architects and have declared an impairment

10% - at least the proportion of the global population with an impairment
How do you fit in or misfit in the world of architecture?
Where are you in the privilege game?
Have you learnt the **rules** of the game?
Diploma 12  2017-2018
World Building: Scripting Spaces

INGO MINNS + MANIJEH VERGHESE

https://issuu.com/manijeh2/docs/dip12_extendedbrief_final
FIGURE 12.7 Thomas Carpentier (2011) The Measure(s) of Man: graduation design project from the Ecole Speciale d'Architecture, Paris. Reprinted by permission of Thomas Carpentier
A recomposed family with multiple singularities should be able to have dinner together at the same table. So each chair has to be especially designed for a specific user, each one is a variation of the same initial chair.
3. Design from difference, from unruly and non-normative bodies
Primary Function:--
Traffic regulation (pedestrian/vehicular)

Secondary use:--
Additional seating (while waiting for buses #473, #300 and #147)

Height: 635 mm
Sittable area: 227 mm depth (max.)
Fabric: cast iron cap with gloss enamel finish

Features:--

Public property X
Backrest
Available borough-wide X

Last used:--
5 days ago

Location:--
Bennett Road bus stop, Prince Regent Lane
A Crash Course in Cloudspotting (the subversive act of horizontality)

An invitation to pause. To listen. To rest.

A journey for the ill, infirm and sick. That is all of us. If not today, then maybe tomorrow.

An ode to invisible impairments, and to acts of bravery we don’t see.

Sara Hendren *Slope Intercept*
In Toronto, Slope: Intercept was hosted by OCADU and Interaccess Gallery in a two-day workshop. We ran an interactive “audit” of a Toronto neighborhood, recording its topography in the company of a professional skateboarder and several wheelchair users. We created a provisional map of the neighborhood with real-time printed photos, and we gathered the skateboarder, a wheelchair-using ramp activist, a parks and recreation administrator, and an architectural theorist as a panel, asking them to speculate about the present and future built landscape of that city.
4. Redefine access as a collective endeavour
Mapping Access is a participatory data-collection and accessibility mapping project based in Nashville, Tennessee. Informed by Disability Justice, intersectionality, environmental humanities, and critical GIS frameworks, the project uses mapping as a critical tool for iterative world-building.
COLLABORATE

Interested in getting involved with Mapping Access? We can help you develop content in the following areas:

**URBAN ACTIVIST MAPPING**
Mapping public spaces and developing spatial stories about public belonging

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**
Integrating mapping pedagogy into the classroom, the lab, and public experiments

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**CAMPUS MAPPING**

[Image description: a screenshot of a campus accessibility map as viewed on a mobile screen. The map itself includes trees and buildings, as well as streets. Points of access (in this case, accessible entrances) are shown with red symbols with wheelchair access symbols on them. A pop-up shows Cohen Memorial Building with an image of the front (a brick building with columns and stairs) and a line of text that says "There is one barrier free entrance."]

[Image description: a view of a crosswalk painted on a neighborhood road in white spray paint by a group of tactical urbanists. The crosswalk begins and ends in front of curb cuts indicated by raised yellow bumps. In the background, we see a brown house with a green lawn and green evergreen trees.]

[Image description: a panel of educators sits in front of a projector screen, which shows a map with red dots. They address an audience of students who take notes in the foreground]
5. challenge what is ‘normal’
Aaron Williamson “Demonstrating the World”

https://weareunlimited.org.uk/commission/aaron-williamson-2/
Liz Crow 2012-13 *Bedding Out*
http://www.roaring-girl.com/work/bedding-out/
What we're asking the students to do today, is to experience the world from a different plane.
ARCHITECTURE BEYOND SIGHT

The Bartlett School of Architecture + The DIS/ORDINARY Architecture Project

ARCHITECTURE BEYOND SIGHT 2018

More from Tim Copsey
Architecture Beyond Sight workshop, Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL
September 2018
THANK YOU
The DIS/ORDINARY Architecture Project

The DIS/ORDINARY Architecture Project aims to change this through the accumulation of multiple small actions that together can create a different culture and, in turn, enable better understanding of how the "normal" is constructed in everyday life, and how it can be critically and creatively contested, undermined by a commitment to social justice for all.

Most critically, we have to ask why disability has sometimes remained stuck in a normative, ahistorical and static, as well as unchallenged, category in relation to building and urban design practice. It is no surprise that architecture and urban design - two domains that are often seen as separate but interrelated - have been slow to develop new forms of thinking and practice that take disability seriously. Yet, the reality is that the way we design and build our towns and cities for everyone has a direct impact on the lives of disabled people and their inclusion in society.

The project asks four main questions:

1. How can we design buildings and spaces that are accessible for all?
2. How can we ensure that design is inclusive and not just a box-ticking exercise?
3. How can we involve disabled people in the design process?
4. How can we promote a culture of inclusivity and equality?

The project seeks to answer these questions through a series of workshops, seminars, and exhibitions, which aim to engage disabled people, architects, and urban designers in a dialogue about the implications of disability in design and urban planning.

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