

Extraordinary Bodies: Disability/Art/Design ARTHI 5575

Mondays, 9-12, Spertus 423

Professor Bess Williamson

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Course Description

This course explores disability as an embodied experience, an analytic frame, a social construction, and a reappraisal of the aesthetics and politics of modern art and design. Topics include the history of performance and exhibition of disabled bodies; aspects of visual and sensory histories; disability identity and “crip culture”; architectural and design accessibility; and contemporary art and design responses to the “extraordinary” body and self. Students will propose topics of independent research.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, the students will:

- Learn about major schools of thought about disability as a cultural and social construction in historical and contemporary scholarship
- Explore pedagogical and scholarly methods that are inclusive of a variety of physical, sensory, and intellectual modalities
- Develop skills of graduate-level reading, writing, and discussion with a consciousness of access and inclusion, for their own and other students’ work
- Prepare a research proposal and project that links works of art and design to broader thinking about disability and culture.

Statement on Accommodations

Your success in this class is important to me. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, including disability, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. I strive to make this class fair and accessible, and if there are aspects of assignments or class meetings that you do not understand or find challenging, please speak to me and I will do my best to explain or adapt the assignment/activity.

If you have met with the Disability Learning and Resource Center and have a letter of accommodation, I am happy to read it and discuss its implications for you. However, I want to note that **letters of accommodation are not required in this class in order to receive accommodations** such as extra time on papers, flexibility on attendance, use of whatever devices are helpful for you (note: if you record class please do not post or publish this media without permission from all members of class and the professor). All that is required is that you discuss your need for accommodation as early in the semester as you can, so that we can work together and plan accordingly.

Contact infor for Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC): 312.499.4278 or email at www.dlrc.saic.edu.

Note on class content: The material in this class includes topics that are sensitive and can be painful or traumatic to explore (including child neglect and murder, racial and sexual violence, and other forms of discrimination whose violence may be explicit or not). I have marked readings that contain particularly graphic descriptions or images, but I also offer this blanket statement that students, particularly those whose personal lives include histories of trauma, may choose to opt out of any reading or discussion for any reason (I ask only that you tell me that you are taking a “content related” absence). Further, in my experience teaching this class, we tend to explore terrain that is familiar to some and entirely unfamiliar to others – such is the lack of basic literacy on disability in our society. Please be patient and respectful of your classmates as we discuss sensitive topics. Share resources generously, listen with an open mind, and make space for varied opinions and experiences. Note always that a person’s disability histories may be invisible or multiple, and that no one is required to disclose disability status in this course or any course at SAIC.

Note on class preparation: All required readings will be posted on our Canvas site, and often include dense and challenging texts, along with suggestions for further exploration via links. Please set aside at least 4-5 hours a week to read carefully, prepare notes for discussion, and gather outside references as you find them appropriate. More time will be required for weeks when papers/presentations are due.

Assignments

Weekly

Attendance– 10 pts. Attendance is mandatory in this class, which includes being present and prepared to discuss readings and contribute to class activities. More than 2 unexcused absences may result in No Credit. Please contact me in advance if you anticipate missing classes or assignment deadlines. Flexibility is usually available, but we need to agree on timelines in advance of posted deadlines.

Participation. 10 pts. I expect students to read (or at least try to read) all required readings for this course and reflect upon them alongside your classmates.

There are a number of ways to participate in class, including:

- class discussion (which will include both extemporaneous and prepared speaking opportunities)
- posts to the Ongoing Discussion board on Canvas, which is open throughout the semester
- tweets responding to any aspect of the course content. Please tag me, @besswww, and #SAIC5575 so that classmates can also follow these comments
- emails to me if you prefer for your responses to remain between us

Discussion Questions/Comments. 30 pts (4 pts/ea). Each week, students will post short comments/reflections on the readings on the class discussion board on Canvas. By 9 pm the night before class, post at least one question or comment on each required reading. These can be informal; I suggest comments such as “I found it interesting that..” “I wondered why...” “I’d like to discuss more about...” etc. You can skip 2 of these responses over the course of the semester and still receive full points.

Short assignments

EveryBody object description: 5 pts. Compose a short (less than 200 words) description of an object in the Smithsonian Museum of American History's EveryBody project. You will present this description without accompanying visual aids before the class.

Class Highlight. 8 pts For one class during the semester, you will be responsible for presenting an object/example of cultural commentary on disability. See handout for further details.

Final Paper and Presentation – 40 pts includes proposal/bibliography, presentation, and commentary for a classmate's in-class presentation. For this project, choose a specific historical* or contemporary case of disability represented in art, design, or other visual/material media. Research the context and maker(s) of these objects, and present an argument about their position within the field of disability cultural studies. Proposals for the paper will be due **Nov 17**, with a short list of sources on the topic (primary and secondary). On **December 10 or 17**, you will deliver a presentation of 8-10 minutes with appropriate visual aids; this presentation may not capture the entirety of your paper but instead will introduce the topic and argument, and allow for a peer review comment and class discussion before you complete the final written work. Your paper, due **Dec 12**, should reflect critical positions that we have covered in class, and should draw on additional secondary reading as needed. Final paper should be 15-20 pages in length and include footnotes or citations of any primary/secondary sources consulted.

*if you are seeking credit for the Art History MA program's Early 20th Century requirement from this class, your final paper must substantially focus on the period of 1900-1950.

Statement on Plagiarism

I take plagiarism VERY SERIOUSLY and will not tolerate students who misrepresent their work. Any degree of plagiarism will result in no credit for the assignment and additional institutional disciplinary action. Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft by presenting another's work as your own, even if you do not intend to; examples include failing to cite sources, copy/pasting text from sources without attribution, and the use of previous course writings as assignments in this class (i.e. plagiarizing yourself). The penalty for plagiarism may result in some loss of some types of financial aid (for example, a No Credit in a course can lead to a loss of merit scholarships), and repeat offenses can lead to expulsion from the School. To find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, see the Flaxman Library or Student Handbook.

Schedule

PART I: Thinking & Writing about Disability

Sept 10 Week 1 Extraordinary Bodies

“Introduction,” and “Disability,” *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction” to *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

NYTimes Disability Series: Read Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s “Becoming Disabled” (August 19, 2016) and scan through the titles of the other pieces in the NY Times’ running series on disability. Read at least one of the other pieces.

September 17 Week 2 Disability in (Art) History

Michael Davidson, “Aesthetics,” *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

Henri-Jacques Stiker, “Western Antiquity: The Fear of the Gods” *A History of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999). (CW: death/murder)

Michel Foucault, “Stultifera Navis,” *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*

*Guest: Jennifer Nelson

Look at:

Art History Teaching Resources: [Disability in Art History](#)
[Stamps of Disability](#)

Leroy Moore, Black Disabled Art History 101

Sept 24 Week 3 Representing Disability

Michael Bérubé, “Representation,” *Keywords in Disability Studies*

Georgina Kleege, *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Beth Haller, “Journalists Should Learn to Carefully Traverse a Variety of Disability Terminology,” National Center on Disability and Journalism,

<http://ncdj.org/2016/01/journalists-should-learn-to-carefully-traverse-a-variety-of-disability-terminology/>

Everybody exercise due

Look at:

NCDJ [Disability Language Style Guide](#)

[Stella Young TED Talk](#) and Morgan Leahy, [Stop Sharing Those Feel-Good Cochlear Implant Videos](#)

[Nineteenth-century Disability](#)

[Deaf: Medical Culture](#)

[Unseen Art: 3D Printing Classical Paintings for the Blind](#)

Oct 1 Week 4 BodyMinds in the Arts

Margaret Price, "Introduction" and "Listening to the Subject of Mental Disability" *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

Petra Koppers, "Introduction," *Disability Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Joseph Grigely, "Beautiful Progress to Nowhere," *Parallel Lines*, 2011,
<http://www.parallellinesjournal.com/article-beautiful-progress-nowhere.html>.
EveryBody exercise

Look at:

Jill Vyn and Chris Smit, [Is There Space for Disabled Artists at Art Fairs?](#)" *Hyperallergic*, Nov 7, 2017. (See also: [DisArt](#))

Elizabeth Guffey, "[Design for the Rest of Us: Where are Design Museums' Benches?](#)"

Kevin Gotkin, "[Alice Sheppard Is Moving The Conversation Beyond Loss and Adversity](#)," *Dance*, June 18, 2018

[Invisible Man: Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison](#) – especially "Harlem is Nowhere" – see also [Lafargue Mental Hygiene Clinic Historical Information](#)

Jay Dolmage on Mental Health in Universities: "[Beyond 'Squeezable Stress Stars'](#)"

PART II: Seeing Disability

Oct 8 Week 5 Freaks and Beggars

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows," *Extraordinary Bodies*. (CW: sexual and racial violence)

Robert Bodgan, "Picturing Disability"

Look at:

Fo Wilson, [The Baartman Diaries](#)

Aaron Williamson, "[My Normal... Your Freak](#)" (2017)

[Inseparable](#) (Review)

[What's Wrong with this Picture?](#)

[Teens Recruit Elvis in the Fight Against Polio](#)

Oct 15 Week 6 Disability in/as Modern Art

Tobin Siebers, "The Aesthetics of Human Disqualification," *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

Circe Hinestrosa, "Appearances Can Be Deceiving: Frida Kahlo's Construction of Disability, Ethnicity and Dress," in *Frida Kahlo: Making Herself Up*, ed. Claire Wilcox and Circe Hinestrosa (London: V&A Publishing, 2018), 66–84.

Look at:

Ivan Albright "[Flesh](#)" at the Art Institute

[On Diane Arbus' Jewish Giant](#)

Damien Hirst "[Charity](#)"

October 22 Week 7 Art Brut / Outsider Art

Jean Dubuffet, "Art Brut is Preferable to Cultural Art" (1949)

David Maclagan, "Art Brut and the Search for the Source of Creative Originality," *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace* (Reaktion, 2009).

Catherine Morris, "Judith Scott and the Politics of Biography," Catherine Morris and Matthew Higgs, eds., *Judith Scott: Bound & Unbound* / (New York: Brooklyn Museum with DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2014).

Trip to Intuit Art Gallery

Look at:

[Henry Darger Room](#) at Intuit Gallery

[James Castle Collection and Archive](#)

[Project Onward](#), Chicago

[The Arts of Life](#), Chicago

Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore: "[What is Visionary Art?](#)"

October 29 Week 8 Genes, Products, Poems

Christina Cogdell, "Products or Bodies?" *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Eli Clare, "At the Center of Cure," *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

Look at:

[Alice Wong on Straws](#)

Roxane Gay, ed. "[Unruly Bodies](#)" Medium series

[Heather Dewey-Hagborg, Radical Love: Chelsea Manning](#)

November 5 Week 9 Devices

Katherine Ott, "Disability Things: Material Culture and American Disability History, 1700-2010," in *Disability Histories*, ed. Susan Burch and Michael Rembis (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 119–35.

David Harley Serlin, "The Other Arms Race," *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21-56.

Look at:

[Enabling the Future/E-Nable](#) and [The Collective Project video](#)

[Karolyn Gehrig and #HospitalGlam](#)

[Engineering at Home](#)

[Halloween and Asylums](#)

November 6 LUNCH TALK: Liz Jackson

November 12 Week 10 Voice

Meryl Alper, *Giving Voice: Mobile Communication, Disability, and Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017).

Graham Pullin, "Statement of Practice: Curating and Creating Design Collections, from Social Mobiles to the Museum of Lost Interactions and Six Speaking Chairs," *Design and Culture* 2, no. 3 (November 1, 2010): 309–28.

Look at:

CBS' "Speechless" (most recent episodes viewable at ABC.com; full series is on Hulu)

Lee Ridley "[Lost Voice Guy](#)"

On Stephen Hawking:

Stephen Hawking, "[My Computer](#)"

Bronwyn Hemsley, [The technology that gave Stephen Hawking a voice should be accessible to all who need it](#)

Stephen Hawking guest stars on [the Simpsons](#)

Final Project Proposal due

November 19 Week 11 Access

Bess Williamson, "Access," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*

Aimi Hamraie, *Design for All*

Elizabeth Guffey, "The Scandinavian Roots of the International Symbol of Access," *Design and Culture* 7, no. 3 (2015): 357–376.

Guest Lecture Michele Friedner (tentative)

Look at:

[Koolhaas Houselife](#) (documentary on the maintenance of Rem Koolhaas' Maison à Bourdeaux - DVD available at Flaxman)

[Accesible Icon](#) (& Sara Hendren's [reflection on the project](#))

Jennifer Burris on [Park McArthur](#), *Bomb*, Feb 2014

[How Gallaudet University's Architects are Redefining Deaf Space](#)

Access narratives: Jason DaSilva, [The Long Wait](#)

Zach Anner, [The Quest for the Rainbow Bagel](#)

November 26 Week 12 Design

Aimi Hamraie, *Principles of Universal Design*

Liz Jackson, "Opinion | We Are the Original Lifehackers," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2018, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/30/opinion/disability-design-lifehacks.html>.

Guest Lecture: Aimi Hamraie, Critical Access Lab

Look at:

Liz Jackson, "Opinion | We Are the Original Lifehackers," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2018, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/30/opinion/disability-design-lifehacks.html>.

Ray Lifchez and Barbara Winslow, "[A House for Someone Unlike Me](#)"

John Hockenberry, "[The Re-Education of Michael Graves](#)," *Metropolis*, 2006.
(web archive - images no longer work)

[Fashion Follows Form: Designs for Sitting](#) at the Royal Ontario Museum
[Access+Ability](#) at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum
Carrie Wade, "[I Looked at my Body and Said Yes: Where Disability and Style Meet,](#)"
Autostraddle, Feb 22, 2016

December 3 NO CLASS – CRIT WEEK

December 10-17 Weeks 13 & 14

Presentations and Comments

FINAL PAPERS DUE Dec 12, 5 pm via Canvas