

Extraordinary Bodies: Disability/Art/Design ARTHI 5575

Tuesdays, 9-12, Maclean 203

Professor Bess Williamson

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Course Description

This course takes its title from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's 1997 book that did much to establish the field of cultural disability studies. The course seeks answers to Garland-Thomson's queries about how physical and intellectual difference are constructed in cultural production by looking at image, object, and spatial representations of disability from the 19th century to recent times.

The course is conducted in seminar style, while also seeking to model accessible formats of academic writing, discussion and exchange. Topics include disability in art and aesthetic histories (Tobin Siebers, Garland-Thomson, Ann Millett-Gallant), museum collections and interpretation (Georgina Kleege, Amanda Cachia), design and technology studies (Christina Cogdell, David Serlin, Ashley Shew), and, throughout the course, access in scholarly and artistic practices and spaces (Aimi Hamraie, Margaret Price).

Assignments include in-class presentations, short and long writings, and exercises exploring accessible strategies. The course ends with a long-form paper, presented to the class in symposium-style with peer comments and opportunities for ongoing editing.

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.

Assignments

Participation. 30 pts. I expect students to read (or at least try to read) all required readings for this course and reflect upon them in exchange with the class. There are a number of ways to participate in class, including:

- **Weekly discussion questions** (2 pts/ea). Each week, students will post short comments/reflections on the readings on the class discussion board on Canvas. By 9 pm the Monday 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..." or simply "question for discussion: --- ." You may also wish to comment on the "Extras" posted, if they catch your interest. You can skip 2 of these responses over the course of the semester and still receive full points.

- 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 or Instagram posts responding to any aspect of the course content. Please tag me, @besswww (twitter) or @accessible.design (Instagram), and #SAIC5575 so that classmates can also follow these comments
- emails to me if you prefer for a response/reflection to remain between us

Access Experiments - 5 pts/each. 3 short assignments to explore and test available accessibility tools and discuss your findings in class. Choose 2 of these 3 to complete for full credit.

1 – Accessible Documents – Due Feb 19

2- Image Descriptions – Due March 11

3- Campus mini-map – Due April 8

Art Institute Intervention - 10 points Students will work in groups to develop accessible, hypothetical programming or communications for the Art Institute. We will select groups and angles of approach in advance, but some possible projects include:

- tour of objects or spaces in the museum
- rewriting of labels or other instructional materials
- online interpretation or visitor materials

In class, groups will present their projects (in class or at the museum - to be scheduled)

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 **April 8**, with a short list of sources on the topic (primary and secondary). On **April 15**, 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 **May 6**, 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.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 Jan 29 **Disability in/and Culture**

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Introduction" to *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
Sami Schalk, "Introduction," *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* / (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

Week 2 Feb 5 **Future(s) of Disability**

Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Warner Books, 1993).
Sami Schalk, "Ch 3: The Future of Bodyminds, Bodyminds of the Future," *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* / (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
Visit to Museum of Contemporary Art

Week 3 Feb 12 **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).
Michel Foucault, "Stultifera Navis," *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*
Elizabeth B. Bearden, *Monstrous Kinds: Body, Space, and Narrative in Renaissance Representations of Disability, Corporealities*. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2019).

Extras:

NCDJ [Disability Language Style Guide](#)

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

NYTimes: [It's Time for a National Museum of Disability](#)

FYI: [#CripRituals call for artists](#)

Week 4 Feb 19 **Disability on Display**

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows," *Extraordinary Bodies*. (CW: sexual and racial violence)
Fo Wilson, *The Baartman Diaries*
Joseph Grigely, "Beautiful Progress to Nowhere," *Parallel Lines*, 2011,
<http://www.parallellinesjournal.com/article-beautiful-progress-nowhere.html>.

Visit to Ryerson-Burnham Libraries: Armory Show "Freak Art" and World's Fairs

Extras:

Jason Lazarus, [202-456-1111](tel:202-456-1111)

[Accessible Japan: Mari Katayama](#)

[Picturing Disability Technologies](#) at the Robert Bogdan Picture Collection

Getty Images [Disability Collection](#)

Week 5 Feb 26 Degenerates & Outsiders

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

Lynne Cooke, "Boundary Trouble: Navigating Margin and Mainstream" *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art ; The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

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

Extras:

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

Disabled Avant Garde, "[Amazing Art](#)" performance

Damien Hirst "[Charity](#)"

[Henry Darger Room](#) at Intuit Gallery

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

Week 6 March 4 Modernist Disability Cultures

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

Wanda Katja Liebermann, "Humanizing Modernism?: Jaap Bakema's Het Dorp, a Village for Disabled Citizens," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 75, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 158–81.

Natalie Wright, [Functional Fashions](#) on Milwaukee Art Museum blog

In class – guests Natalie Wright & Liz Jackson on disability fashion history

Extras:

[Gensler's Inclusive All-Gender Restroom Icon](#)

Liz Jackson on [Disabled Lifehackers](#)

Teen Vogue, "[What it's Like to be a Disabled Model in the Fashion Industry](#)"

[Alice Wong on Straws](#)

Week 7 March 11 Disabling Museums / Access Practices

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

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.

View: [EveryBody.si.edu](#) (curated by Katherine Ott)

In class: Alex Chen on accessible interaction design

Extras:

Contra* podcast: [Alice Sheppard on interpreting/staging Disability Culture in dance](#)

Jackson Bird: [No More Craptions](#)

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

Week 8 March 18 Art Institute interventions

Week 9 March 25 Institutions of Care and Cure

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

Riva Lehrer, "Opinion | Where All Bodies Are Exquisite," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2017, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/09/opinion/where-all-bodies-are-exquisite.html>.

Jay Dolmage, "Beyond Squeezable Stress Stars: Mental Health on University Campuses,"

Discrimination and Disadvantage, August 23 2018

In class: Disability at SAIC with Valerie St. Germain

Final Paper initial proposal due

Extras:

[Halloween and Asylums](#)

[Elizabeth Catte on Preserving A Eugenics Hospital](#)

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

April 1 – NO CLASS – CRIT WEEK

Week 10 April 8 Critical Access

Bess Williamson, "Access," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

Aimi Hamraie, "Critical Access Studies," *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Final Paper Abstract & Bibliography Due

Extras:

Rose Eleventh, [When disability tech is just a marketing exercise](#)

Shannon Finnegan, [Anti-Stairs Club Lounge](#)

Aimi Hamraie & Shannon Finnegan on Access in the Art World

[Engineering at Home](#)

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

Week 11 April 15 Technologies of Disability Justice

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Care Webs" *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018).

Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch, "Crip Technoscience Manifesto," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–34.

Extras:

[Sins Invalid](#)

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

Week 13 April 22 Presentations I

Week 14 April 29 Presentations II

Week 15 May 6 – class reflection / syllabus design workshop
Final papers due by 5 pm