

Disabled by DeSign?

A critical seminar on ableist practical and political designs of space and time, and how differently-abled bodies are being occupied by their traces and signatures in the flesh.

Seminar Description:

In the course of this seminar, we want to critically investigate the practices and politics of the abled realities we occupy everyday. Even though there are design and construction schemes that are intended to “include disabled populations”, to “provide access” for everybody, to “assist in creating a feeling of normality”, etc., more often than not, these are only another form of a politics of tolerance that reify the structural and symbolic violence of the somatic norms of *Ableism*. As practices of inclusion, they try and re-integrate those the practices first have to exclude. In this seminar, we will embark on an enterprise of critique of the *abelist* pre-conceptions that occupy the space and time of the narratives we are entangled in as our everyday lifeworlds. The result of this critique is the question what would these narratives and the practices and politics they occupy be like, what kinds of experiences would they enable, if the practices and politics, the spaces and temporalities they narrativize would be designed not to adhere to ableist somato-normative imperatives but to an aesthetics of bodies and minds that are plastic, variable, constantly changing and becoming different. What would a soma-aesthetic design practice and politics be like that is based on a different concept of agency, body, and ecology, as constituted in a different kind of political imagination? How would and could we reoccupy the practices and politics of time and place? In this seminar, I will try to connect practice and theory by showing how and why experience is where practice and theory come together: Understanding experiences of both the spaces and temporalities that bodies occupy, and the practices and politics that occupy bodies, while creating and exploring strategies to reoccupy these with diffracted bodies is what I will try to accomplish in three interlocking spheres of discursive experience, which will interchange during the seminars non-linear progress: Politics, practices, re-occupations.

1. *Politics*: How are experiences of the spaces and temporalities we occupy constituted?

This part of the seminar focuses on content and theory.

The structural and symbolic violence of everyday worlds. The narrative design of the world and how events in space, time, practices and politics form narrow relationscapes for experience.

The violence of tolerance: A world designed by able people for able people, and the post-exclusive inclusion of disabled people.

Living (in) the intersectionalities: You're never 'just disabled', you are a black woman in a wheel-chair, the deaf child of an illegal immigrant, or an ageing, Muslim single mom.

'The politics of the gaze' or 'The narrative dialectics of technoscientific seeing': Technologically produced images of 'normal bodies' look back at you and construct your narrative.

Contested Illness, Contesting Disability: The genealogy and deconstruction of the hegemony of “normalcy”.

2. *Practices*: What is the experience of the practices and politics that occupy our body

Here, we want to make experiences or seek them out. We want to interact with people whose experiences make explicit the hegemony of ableism, and to try to understand the experience. We want to invite experts on these experiences and let them guide us towards understanding the limits and possibilities of different abilities.

The Gaze: The age of digital technology has equipped each and everyone of us with cameras. We take pictures. What are “abled moments” we spot visually and would direct our camera to? I want to develop the gaze of the participants of the seminar. I want them to see not just where ableism fails, but also where the failure is pre-ordained to fail and why. The epistemic trap of the politics of tolerance lies in the fact that the world, constructed for able bodies, is supposedly amendable, that it can be made 'to tolerate or even include others'. But this perspective fails to understand the idea that it is the design of the world we made that is the continuous practice of exclusion of those who are different than *able*. It is important to see how the world itself could be designed to be different, not to find ways to include those it excluded, but to see where exclusion is waiting to happen and to consider a design that is non-exclusive to begin with.

Spatiality:

What is space like in a wheel-chair? Is movement impaired? Or is it truly different? Navigating space blindly does not mean one does not have a conception of space. How is space experienced without sight? As we age, the actual practice of space changes, and so does the experience of space. We want to explore.

Temporality:

Imagine your mind at a different speed. We want to understand how the experience of able practices requires a specific temporal organization that is inherently fragile. We want to understand what it means 'not to be able' to live by the temporal organization of the able hegemony.

3. *Re-Occupy:* To re-occupy, we will have to learn about the design of experience before we can design the world's spaces, temporalities, and practices.

The readings we do, the people we meet, and the interactions that guide the different experiences that we are trying to gain in this seminar will help us to conceive practices of re-designing.

As its goal this seminar will engage in a project of autocritique: Together, we want to design a classroom and a course on Experience of Difference that is intended to build an education and learning experience that does not follow the hegemony of ableism.