



Disability and “Affordances” of the Everyday

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Interviewer: Simone Natale

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Interviewer: Simone Natale

Arseli Dokumacı completed her PhD in performance studies at Aberystwyth University and is currently an FQRSC-funded postdoctoral fellow at McGill University, Social Studies of Medicine Department. Arseli is also working as a research associate at Concordia University’s Mobile Media Lab for the Canadian Consortium on Performance and Politics in the Americas (CCPPA). In her doctoral project, Arseli explored experiences of invisible disabilities, in particular pain and mobility-related impairments, through the creation of a two-hour ethnographic documentary on everyday life task performances. Materials from this research have appeared in *Performance Research Journal* (2013) and in the edited collections *Disability in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (2011) and *Misperformance: essays in shifting perspectives* (2014). In her current postdoctoral project, Arseli is investigating the use of performance as a measure of effectiveness and efficacy in biomedicine.

When did you first become involved with mobilities research?

I cannot give an exact date for when I started to work with mobilities but I have always had some kind of connection to mobilities throughout my education and research. I studied translation, which is kind of a metaphorical way of seeing the mobilities of language. I continued with film and representation – representation of movement and mobility in the moving image. And then, I continued in performance studies, looking at day-to-day movements and gestures of people with disabilities and their interactions with their environments. So, I have somehow always been involved with mobilities.

How do you use mobilities in your research?

My specific research focus involves the mobility of people who have disabilities. I am interested in how different types of disabilities, different types of impairments, effect the way people are moving throughout everyday spaces, throughout everyday terrains and architectures. In my research I ask: how do disabled people engage with quotidian objects and tools? In this sense, I am interested in the intersection of mobilities and everyday life performances.

What are body techniques and how important are they in the life of disabled subjects?

Drawing from Marcel Mauss, I apply “body techniques” to my research in order to understand how disabled people engage with common practices and movement traditions of a society. The infrastructure and architecture, the way that everyday spaces are built, are most often not made to complement bodily differences of disabled individuals. What disabled subjects tend to do, from my point of view, is find their own techniques, their own “affordances” in order to deal with this lack in the existing structures. “Affordances” is a term I borrow from James Gibson’s *Ecological Psychology* (1979) to understand how disabled people move differently throughout the everyday. They create different choreographies to manage their daily life and to overcome obstacles. For me, affordances are the way disabled people recreate the established body techniques of the everyday.

Why and how do you use video in your work to address issues of mobilities?

For me, video is a powerful tool because I am particularly interested in the disabilities that do not show up. I find video and the combination of sound and video a powerful tool for representing how invisible disabilities are occurring and in which ways they could be rendered visible. Video can capture the details that are not really visible to us throughout the flow of daily routine, the parts that we do not really see. So, this is why and how I try to incorporate video as a tool in my research.