Exploring spatial constructions of deafness, disability and neurodiversity

Going beyond ableism, informing architecture's new disability future

# Deafness, Disability and Neurodiversity in architecture: An introduction

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In her 2022 review of David Gissen's *The Architecture of Disability* for the *Journal of Architectural Education* (*JAE*), architectural and urban historian Wanda Katja Liebermann notes: 'That this is *JAE*'s first review of a book on disability confirms architecture's lag in treating impairment as fundamental to design discourse'.[1] This poignant comment can be extended beyond *JAE*. Despite having sporadically featured scholarship that grapples with bodily diversity and impairment,[2] the longest-standing journals of architecture with renowned presence in the field have not yet consistently devoted thematic issues centred on these questions. **arq** does this now, and Liebermann's words have prompted us, as curators of the issue, to reflect on our responsibility and the positionality of this special issue on 'Deafness, Disability, and Neurodiversity in Architecture' within the wider ecology of architectural publishing.

## Publishing ecologies

The glaring absence of the variability of human bodies from architectural scholarship – as highlighted by Liebermann, Gissen, and others – deserves historical explication. It is even more striking when one considers that it is now almost five decades ago that influential twentieth-century figures like Charles W. Moore pointed at these problems. In *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, co-authored with sculptor Kent C. Bloomer in 1977, the celebrated architect suggested that professional education imbues abstract values and idealised approaches to design. Young students' resulting reliance on formal norms and universalising stereotypes, Moore argued, distances them from the diverse lived and embodied experiences of the people for whom they supposedly envision their buildings.[3]

Within the next two decades, this crucial insight seems only to have been picked-up by human geographers and sociologists such as Peter Hall and Rob Imrie,

who sought to contextualise and document architects' 'professional resistance to responding to the needs of disabled people' through the empirical findings of a survey that they conducted with UK-based design firms in the late 1990s.[4] Meanwhile, mainstream discussion around the body in architecture, even when it grapples with injury, frailty, impairment, disfigurement, or collapse (as in the work of Deconstructivist practitioners such as Coop Himmelb(l)au) continued to be conducted in abstract, idealised, or metaphorical terms.[5] At the same time, related attempts by feminist collective practices such as Matrix, who foregrounded architects' reluctance to engage with the embodied ways in which gender, ethnicity, or race diversify the lived experience of the built environment in 1980s Britain, developed at the fringes of professional discourse.[6] This left architecture in an awkward position when compared with research undertaken not only in the fields of urban geography and disability studies, from which 'most disability critiques of architecture emerge', as Liebermann rightly notes, but even in closely associated fields like design history. At the time of writing, the *Journal of Design History* published an open call for papers for an upcoming issue on 'Designing for Disability Futures',[7] but no similar call is currently on the horizon of architectural journals.

When one considers the field from the vantage point of recently published monographs and edited volumes, however, the bigger picture is different. Cultural historian David Serlin's 2025 book *Window Shopping with Helen Keller* has just joined Liebermann's 2024 *Architecture's Disability Problem* and Gissen's previously mentioned *The Architecture of Disability* as among the most direct recent engagements with sensory and bodily diversity from an architectural perspective.[8] These three studies represent long-awaited and eagerly-anticipated culminations of each author's respective decade-long research projects, fulfilling the potential of the monograph as a work of reference. Refined over the years, each volume represents sophisticated reflective scholarship engaging with diverse contexts to arrive at a wide-ranging yet in-depth account of the topic. Alongside other milestone precedents,[9] these publications offer a more comprehensive basis for engaging with deafness, disability, and neurodiversity in the field.

Journal special issues - such as this **arq** – have a particular role to play. Open to shorter production cycles, they comprise heterogeneous sets of articles that advance disciplinary thinking. Covering different ground in a more limited and specifically defined territory, journal articles can also be exploratory, as opposed to the longer thinking that typically underpins a book project. This scholarship, often either tangentially developed or constituting work-in-progress, keeps discussions alive and up-to-date in the field. Occupying a middle ground between the monograph and the more speculative and open-ended research of a conference paper, journal articles thus hold a distinct place in the architectural publishing ecology.

This is at least how we, as curators of this issue, have approached our contributions. We take inspiration from the recent monographs we noted above. Like Serlin, we aim to cover topics in a period that spans two centuries to arrive at the

present, reappraising overlooked moments in the history of architecture – or to reimagine it altogether. Like Gissen, we work to change existing practices in the discipline. Like Liebermann, we are nondisabled neurotypical architectural historian relatives of our deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse family members. Following all the above, our approach is advocacy-minded, focusing on cultural imaginaries, empathy, allyship, and activism. Furthermore, this issue reflects **arq**'s aim to bridge academe and practice, across disciplinary and national contexts, seeking points of contact between methods, topics, and epistemologies conventionally assumed to be distinct. As such, this issue includes longer format peer-reviewed articles alongside shorter researcher-led enquiries and more experimental, creative practice-focused writing. All contributions are springboards for further debate, and each article pushes the boundaries of architectural history, practice, education, imaginaries, curation, or conservation.

A subset of the articles that follow have were assembled following a session on 'Histories of Deafness and Disability in Architecture' that we chaired at the annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in April 2024. The session was driven by our conviction that deafness and disability must inform our discipline more thoroughly and meaningfully. Adopting a critical standpoint that considered the imbrication of impairment in the built environment, our panel highlighted overshadowed histories, designers, and approaches by re-centring architectural discourse in relation to diverse embodied experiences. Informed by our engagement with related precedents and definitions, the conference contributors shared a common language of key terms. Drawing from Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Rebecca Sanchez, for example, we use the term 'Deaf' when referring to a cultural minority centred around the use of sign language, and reserve the term 'deaf' for the audiological condition of hearing impairment and for individuals for whom Deaf cultural identity cannot be assumed, mostly because of the historic moment in which they lived. As Sanchez also underscores, however, there is a fine line: 'the distinction between deafness as a physical state and deafness as cultural identity is not always (or ever) a clear one'.[10] In addition, we avoid terms that perpetuate a deficit-oriented framing of disability and neurodiversity, or imply deviations and divergences from supposedly established norms. Rather, we follow science writer Steve Silberman in approaching the related conditions 'as naturally occurring [physical and] cognitive variations with distinctive strengths', which usher in unique contributions to knowledge and culture at large.[11] To highlight them, we resort to the verb 'to crip', in the context of crip theory, to describe claiming a topic for disability studies.[12] Equally constructive discussions around the 'bodymind' have further enabled us to gather our reflections on deafness, disability, and neurodiversity under a single umbrella term which underscores the neurophysiological intertwinement of embodied lived experiences.[13]

The articles that developed out of the conference - by Gail Dubrow and Laura Leppink, Naina Gupta, Matthew Schrage and Andrew Gipe-Lazarou – are complemented here by further invited contributions from colleagues with a long-

standing presence in the field including Jos Boys, Ann Heylighen, and Natalia Pérez-Liebergesell. The voices of architects, younger scholars, and emerging writers – Maria Kramer, Danielle Koplitz, Iason Stathatos and Anna Ulrikke Andersen – who co-authored articles, reviewed buildings and exhibitions, or conducted interviews, further enrich this issue. Creative and intellectual exchanges between these articles interweave the self-advocating voices and subjectivities of deaf or disabled scholars of different ages with those of their hearing peers, nondisabled advocates, or neurotypical allies in collectively advancing liberatory practices. These pages thus ignite conversations between different generations, bodyminds, lived experiences, and political engagements with the built environment. Following Gissen's example, this volume resists pigeonholing disabled researchers into studying their own groups and being held responsible for raising wider awareness around them. By going beyond addressing questions of accessible space design only in material terms, we join Gissen and Liebermann in a wider critique of the discipline.

## Spatial constructs

Lennard Davis argues that disability 'is not a minor issue that relates to a relatively small number of unfortunate people; it is part of a historically constructed discourse, an ideology of thinking about the body under certain historical circumstances'. As a result, he emphasises, scholarship must not consider 'the person using the wheelchair or the Deaf person but the set of social, historical, economic, and cultural processes that regulate and control the way we think about and think through the body'.[14] The contributions gathered in this issue start from the premise that, beyond the factors that Davis identifies, *architectural* processes must also be seen as central producers of disability. In other words, disability is a social, historical, economic and cultural construction, and also very much a *spatial* construction. The main thread connecting our authors is their desire to grapple with the built environment's long-standing entwinement with ableism, addressing the partialities of architectural histories, considering how we might, in the words of Boys, design – and think - *from* disability, rather than *for* it.

The opening articles adopt a long-term historical perspective, expanding historical horizons around diverse bodyminds in architecture, retrieving hidden precursors and interrupted lines of continuity between distant periods and their contemporary legacies. Nina Vollenbröker considers the planning, construction, and operation of an early purpose-built residential school for deaf children in the mid-nineteenth century. Entitled '*Hide* and *Speak*', her contribution traces how the *visibility* (or its absence) and the *voice* (or its absence) of deaf children was mediated by Edinburgh's Donaldson Hospital, designed by William Henry Playfair (1790–1857). Vollenbröker argues that the architecture of special education, through its power to organise and control bodies in space, was a key contributor to the changing, increasingly problematic cultural understandings of deafness between 1840 and 1900. She details clearly the instrumentality of architecture in ongoing processes of attaching meaning to disability: from the initial concerted efforts to provide formal

deaf education, space was at the centre of debates about what it meant to be a child who does not hear. The architecture of deaf teaching was fiercely contested by educators, legislators, governments, and financial donors – in other words, by those who had the power to organise bodies in space. Vollenbröker highlights historical reflection as a potent constituent in the construction of social selfhoods and hierarchies: how we think about buildings, she proposes, is a site of powerful control and deaf spatial experience has too long been omitted from narratives of architectural value, historical importance, and shared heritage.

Gail Dubrow and Laura Leppink are similarly concerned with using archival material to firmly position deafness as a constitutive creative force in architectural history. They draw from Gallaudet University's special collections to revisit the life and work of Olof Hanson (1862–1933), the earliest known deaf architect to practise in the United States of America, highlighting the obstacles that Hanson encountered as an educated deaf person and the support he received from social networks within the deaf community. As the authors trace Hanson's attempts to secure an architectural education and enter professional practice or contextualise his efforts among those of other early deaf architects, they also demonstrate the tactics and skills that the community had to develop to navigate the ableist barriers of our discipline – many of which remain disappointingly relevant in the present. The fact that 'only 1% of architects currently identify as disabled, and of that 1%, only 0.2% define as deaf', as currently indicated by Deaf architect Chris Laing, demonstrates the persistence of professional barriers.[15] Dubrow and Leppink draw attention to Hanson's embodied spatial knowledge, his attempts to address the distinctive needs of deaf people in his buildings, and his legacy of ushering in long-lasting reforms in the design of standard building types such as schools, residences, and social spaces. In so doing, the authors join Serlin and Vollenbröker in proposing that the nineteenth century plays a key role in emerging efforts to document inclusive design in histories of deafness and architecture. Hanson's extensive portfolio, including the well-known, but still under-studied, Charles Thompson Memorial Hall in Minnesota *[1]*, could indeed be seen as heralding the contemporary concept of DeafSpace.[16]

Camille Janssen, Danielle Koplitz, Natalia Pérez-Liebergesell, and Ann Heylighen continue this important quest to better understand deaf architects and spaces rooted in Deaf identity – in this case by focusing on present-day architectural education. Their article follows a young woman, co-author Danielle Koplitz, who was born deaf, uses sign language, and who, at the time of writing, is studying to become an architect. Drawing on extensive interviews with Koplitz, the authors narrate her lived experiences – including her feeling unlike other children at an early age, her intuitive penchant for open architectural space as a teenager, and her formative education at Gallaudet University – before querying how the student's deafness now profoundly and positively inform her designs. Illustrating Koplitz's creative work, the article calls-out architectural education's reliance on canonical notions of universality and normativity, and the continued pervasiveness of ableism in architectural practice, pedagogy, and history. The authors ask our discipline to

draw on its capacity to counter othering, stop materialising asymmetric power relationships, and capitalise on the creative and critical value of designing-in others.

Designing-out othering to design-in others does not stop at academic education. Its application in practice would also run counter to prevalent stereotypes and expectations about the presence, activity and desires of diverse bodyminds in public, commercial, work, or private spaces, including a widespread conviction that 'disabled people don't frequent places focused on glamour and beauty'.[17] Maria Kramer details a project which attempts to actively design-in – and work outwards from – bodily diversity. Her paper explores a recently completed private pool house *[2.]*, drawing from the lengthy design discussions that underpinned its conception and delivery. The new structure is an extension to a London home – surrounded by a mature garden, flooded with light, and carefully crafted for KP: a client who lives with Multiple Sclerosis and uses a wheelchair. 'I often think it's the environment that disables you', KP suggests, alluding to the normative assumptions the built environment makes about human bodies. Kramer shows how the pool house rises beyond the clinical aesthetic which stubbornly clings to so many accessible spaces 'as if disabled people don't deserve beauty'.[18] She details the intricate, non-linear design process which – through transparent communication between architect, builders, and client – gradually shifted the understanding of disability from being seen as a limitation or restriction, to being viewed as a central gain and vital enrichment to the project.

Naina Gupta returns to the theme of swimming pools, shifting to a historical and theoretical approach. Her contribution 'Physiotherapy and Play: The Role of the Swimming Pools in Franklin D. Roosevelt's Vision of Polio Rehabilitation at Warm Springs' foregrounds the 32nd US American president whose lower body was paralysed following a polio infection and the therapeutic centre that he founded in Warm Springs, Georgia with physiotherapist Helena Mahoney and architect Henry J. Tombs. Gupta foregrounds Warm Springs as the one environment where Roosevelt (1882-1945) not only shared his experience of disability openly but also contemplated the larger community of individuals living with the same condition. At a time when bodily diversity and difference were less accepted, the centre reconstituted disabled individuals' sense of self through activities that included bathing in mineralised waters, participating in physiotherapy and exercises, and engaging in social events. The spaces of Warm Springs were key to achieving this aim, Gupta poignantly argues, and the article foregrounds architecture not as a backdrop to, but as an integral part of, treatment efforts. A vital and vibrant social space of rehabilitation, swimming pools therefore join the discussion around spaces of care for chronic illnesses and disabilities which tends to focus on the typologies of sanatoria or asylums.[19]

The agency of architecture in the art of living with deafness, disability, or neurodiversity is by no means limited to medical treatment. Two decades ago, architect and journalist Lisa Findley foregrounded the significant role that the discipline plays in empowering disenfranchised social groups and reinforcing their

visibility.[20] Stylianos Giamarelos considers architecture's cultural agency in cultivating collective imaginaries around neurodiversity by discussing designs that move beyond Findley's focus on buildings. In 'Neurodiversifying Space: Affective Architectures of Dementia from Buro Kader's De Hogeweyk to Florian Zeller's *The Father*', he argues for creative narratives as a valuable framework for thinking through architecture's role in relation to neurodiversity. He draws on the theatre production (2012) and the feature film (2020) of Zeller's story about an old engineer living with dementia, and ensuing frictions with his caregiving family. While *The Father*'s non-linear scenes all take place in the same apartment, the set changes subtly but constantly as the performance unfolds. Following the story from the viewpoint of the protagonist, spectators share the same difficulties that he encounters to reconcile all aspects of his lifeworld without contradiction in a way that also makes sense to those around him *[3]*. In this way, architecture helps render the lived experience of dementia relatable to neurotypical audiences: a first step towards validating it and countering its othering. Giamarelos proposes that such creative outputs help architects expand their cultural imaginaries around neurodiversity, creatively engaging with related conditions in their practice. Probing this further, he highlights Níall McLaughlin and Yeoryia Manolopoulou's collaborative practices of dialogic drawing for the Alzheimer's Respite Centre in Dublin, Ireland (2009, 2016), as an important step in working with people living with dementia to transgress the normative limits of care homes and typical reductive design principles.

Creative writing and the cultivation of cultural imaginaries, this time around deafness, are central too to Matthew Schrage and Andrew Gipe-Lazarou's investigation of Chilmark: a town on the US island of Martha's Vineyard which has long had many deaf residents, operating equally with both signed and spoken languages. Chilmark is thus frequently cited as a site of cultural fantasy, where deaf and hearing individuals harmoniously co-exist. Schrage and Gipe-Lazarou examine the town's spatial artefacts to discuss its deaf community's desired cultural position in relation to the mainstream. They contextualise Chilmark with contrasting fictional utopias that reject this amalgamation in favour of complete deaf separation and distinctiveness from hearing cultures. These include Eyeth, the mythical eye-centric planet of the Deaf in place of the ear-centric Earth, John Jacobus Flournoy's 'Scheme for a Deaf Commonwealth', and Douglas Bullard's novel *Islay*. From fact to fiction and back again, the article interrogates relationships between opposing stances – integration and separation – to critique a persistent ambivalence within US Deaf culture which has defined Chilmark's community since its inception in the early 1800s.

Schrage and Gipe-Lazarou's discussion of utopias highlights the importance of imagining diverse bodyminds in architecture in relation to possible futures. The two 'insight' texts concluding this volume further address aspects of this question, advancing related histories and archaeologies. Starting at the gates of the Acropolis, Iason Stathatos allows his eyes to ascend and circle the ancient citadel atop its rocky outcrop. Noting how these sites have been repeatedly re-envisioned and modified

for contemporary accessibility, he ponders the fifth-century BCE ramp that once connected the nearby Agora and the Propylaea. This wide, archaic structure has recently become the centrepiece of the exhibition 'An Archaeology of Disability' curated by Gissen with art historian Jennifer Stager, and architect and historian Mantha Zarmakoupi. Housed at the Canellopoulos Museum on the northern slope of the Acropolis, the exhibition presented a counter-reconstruction of the canonical Athenian archaeological site through the lens of impairment. It included ancient artefacts relevant to present-day disabled bodies and highlighted collective human difference across space and time. The central contribution of the exhibition, Stathatos reminds us however, lies in a new way of addressing disability as a form of historical and spatial inquiry.

Sooner or later, such endeavours return to archives. As Anna Ulrikke Andersen observes however, the gate to official repositories could prove as exclusionary as the modern reconstructed archaeological site of the Athenian Acropolis. In archives of the built environment, disabled people frequently appear in familiar and expected sources: in drawings and logbooks documenting the construction and operation of asylums and hospitals; in statutory applications tracing architects' slowly growing but half-hearted engagement with ramps, tactile paving, and signage; in ever-changing legislation and public policy aiming to ensure access to public spaces. Such examples highlight persistent cultural biases framing disability through a deficit lens.[21] Simultaneously, there remains a persistent lack of disability representation in architectural archives. Records might be – intentionally or unintentionally – created to imbue the perspectives of some while erasing the perspectives of others. Records might be treated carelessly, misplaced, or not selected for preservation. They might be grouped with other documents and not indexed in catalogues. In conversation with Jos Boys, Andersen asks what materials, visitors and narratives typically cross the threshold of formal repositories. She ponders why some items are carefully preserved while others are excluded. Such archival absences betray that not all pasts are deemed worthy of documentation and that the voices and perspectives of many historically-marginalised communities – including disabled people – are still silenced. In consequence, partial histories continue to be perpetuated, normative narratives confirmed, and alternative forms of thinking about space, and creating it, get missed.

## Open-ended futures

'In the flow of everyday life, disability usually comes to us as embodied mistakes and, thus, as mistaken bodies', Tanya Titchkosky critically observes.[22] The collected articles of this issue problematise these mistaken understandings of diverse bodyminds in an architectural context, highlighting the relevance of overlooked experiences, practices, and histories. This issue thus moves away from stereotypical representations of living with deafness, disability, and neurodiversity, underscoring their potential to fuel architectural imaginaries. To *crip* both the discipline and the built environment, the profession needs to overcome the persistent 'us-them' dichotomy that accompanies thinking around diverse bodyminds. As Andersen and Boys concur, much is still to be

done. Even when mainstream discourse directly addresses spatial justice, deafness, disability, and neurodiversity effectively remain marginalised[23] – an oversight that comes at immense cost across all architectural registers.

Much remains to be done in practice. As the DisOrdinary Architecture Project crucially note:

> *Fitting* smoothly *into the world is not a very creative place to be, because it doesn't require you to pay attention to your surroundings, and assumptions about your place in the world. In comparison, having a non-normative bodymind can actually increase your creativity*.[24]

Introducing disability, deafness, and neurodiversity to architecture adds *friction* to all-too-smooth design practices. It effaces the clarity of spatial narratives and the linearity of their predictable processes. It calls attention to the controlled, narrow, and reductive understandings of humanity that underpin the constructed environments of everyday life. It offers the profession an opportunity to imagine alternative spaces. However, scholarship that addresses how designs could be uniquely informed from this standpoint remains sparse.[25] While architecture cannot possibly arrive at universally suitable designs, it can contribute to collective attempts to live together which start from recognising diverse embodied and lived experiences as equally valuable.[26]

Much is still to be done in scholarship too. Returning to the theme of archives, historian Achille Mbembe argues that any repository 'is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged "unarchivable"'.[27] The constant omissions of diverse bodyminds from architectural archives and research has, for decades, reinforced the perpetuation of partial or distorted spatial histories. Advancing scholarship that speaks to the cross-cutting ways in which deafness, disability, and neurodiversity meet the built world can retrieve multifarious ways lived experiences that have creatively generated alternative spatial visions and narratives.[28]

Lastly, much remains still to be done in pedagogy too.[29] Education scholar Nirmala Erevelles notes that 'even though critical theories of education have privileged the theorisation of the body along the axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality, they have consistently omitted any mention of the "disabled" body'.[30] To obliquely rephrase Gissen, the goal is not only to enable diverse bodyminds to become more emphatically present in the sites and subject matter of architectural education, but also to change pedagogical practices, methods, and epistemologies.[31] Such changes require disrupting built environment curricula that centre on 'able', neurotypical bodyminds, project normativity onto space, and perpetuate discriminatory approaches as neutral, normal, and to be expected. Similar to how race is currently being problematised in architectural curricula,[32] bodily and neuro-diversity can become central analytical lenses to approach both the field and the education of built environment professionals.

Summing-up, as curators of this special issue, we share Liebermann's hope 'to inform new thinking and action for architecture's disability *future*'.[33] The contributions to this volume are catalysts for imagining how change might be enacted at various scales, registers, and practices of theory and history, education, and design, to finally celebrate the values and qualities that deafness, disability and neurodiversity can bring for architectures yet to come.

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## Notes

1. Wanda Katja Liebermann, 'The Architecture of Disability: Buildings, Cities, and Landscapes Beyond Access', book review, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 23 August (2024).
2. See, for example, 'Sick Architecture', ed. by Beatriz Colomina, Nick Axel and Nikolaus Hirsch. Online at: <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/sick-architecture> [accessed 28.11.2024].
3. Charles W. Moore and Kent C. Bloomer, *Body, Memory, and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p.ix.
4. Peter Hall and Rob Imrie, 'Architectural Practices and Disabling Design in the Built Environment', *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*, 26.3, June (1999), 409–25 (423).
5. See, for example, George Dodds and Robert Tavernor (eds.), *Body and Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); cf. David Gissen, *The Architecture of Disability: Buildings, Cities, and Landscapes beyond Access* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), pp.87–89.
6. Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-made Environment* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

7. See David Serlin and Ignacio G. Galán, 'Call for Papers: Designing for Disability Futures', *Journal of Design History*, 2024, online at: <https://academic.oup.com/jdh/pages/cfp-designing-for-disability-futures> [accessed 28.11.2024].
8. David Serlin, *Window Shopping with Helen Keller: Architecture and Disability in Modern Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2025); Wanda Katja Liebermann, *Architecture's Disability Problem* (London: Routledge, 2024); Gissen, *The Architecture of Disability*.
9. See, for example, Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Graham Pullin, *Design Meets Disability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Jos Boys, *Doing Disability Differently: An Alternative Handbook on Architecture, Dis/ability and Designing for Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2014); Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Sun-Young Park, *Ideals of the Body: Architecture, Urbanism, and Hygiene in Postrevolutionary Paris* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018); Elizabeth Guffey, *Designing Disability: Symbols, Space, and Society* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018); Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture* (Zurich: Lars Müller, 2019); Bess Williamson, *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design* (New York: NYU Press, 2020); Sara Hendren, *What Can a Body Do? How We Meet the Built World* (London: Penguin, 2020).
10. Brenda Jo Brueggemann, *Deaf Subjects: Between Identities and Places* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Rebecca Sanchez, *Deafening Modernism: Embodied Language and Visual Poetics in American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), p.153.
11. Steve Silberman, *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and how to Think Smarter about People who Think Differently* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2015), p.15.
12. See Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Michael Davidson, *Distressing Language: Disability and the Poetics of Error* (New York: NYU Press, 2022), p.7.
13. See Margaret Price, 'The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain', *Hypatia*, 30.1, Winter (2015), 268-84; Babette Rothschild, *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment* (New York: Norton, 2000).
14. Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p.2.
15. See The Disordinary Architecture Project, *Many More Parts than M! Reimagining Disability, Inclusion and Access beyond Compliance* (London: Disordinary Architecture Project, 2024), p. 54; Alice Wong (ed.), *Disability Intimacy: Essays on Love, Care and Desire* (London: Vintage Books, 2024).
16. See Hansel Bauman, *DeafSpace Design Guidelines*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University, 2010).
17. Liebermann, *Architecture's Disability Problem*, p. 23.
18. The DisOrdinary Architecture Project, *Many More Parts than M!*, p.19.

19. Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture*; Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*.
20. See Lisa Findley, *Building Change: Architecture, Politics, and Cultural Agency* (London: Routledge, 2005).
21. Gissen, *The Architecture of Disability*, p. xv.
22. Tanya Titchkosky, *Disability, Self, and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p.17.
23. For instance, disability is only tangentially mentioned (in relation to sidewalk curb cuts) on two of 300 pages of Dana Cuff's recent monograph *Architectures of Spatial Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2023), 213–14; as pointed out in Liebermann, *Architecture's Disability Problem*, p. 3.
24. The DisOrdinary Architecture Project, *Many More Parts than M!*, p. 79 (emphasis added); cf. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept', *Hypoxia*, 26.3 (2011), 591–609..
25. See Natalia Pérez-Liebergesell, Peter-Willem Vermeersch and Ann Heylighen, 'Designing from a Disabled Body: The Case of Architect Marta Bordas Eddy', *Multimodal Technologies and Interaction*, 2(1).4, January (2018); Natalia Pérez-Liebergesell, Peter-Willem Vermeersch and Ann Heylighen, 'Through the Eyes of a Deaf Architect: Reconsidering Conventional Critiques of Vision-Centered Architecture', *The Senses and Society*, 14.1 (2019), 46-62.
26. See Mia Mingus, 'Changing the Framework: Disability Justice: How our Communities Can Move beyond Access to Wholeness', *Leaving Evidence*, 12 February 2011, online at: <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/> [accessed 28.11.2024].
27. Achille Mbembe, 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits', in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), pp.19-27 (p.20).
28. See, for example, Nina Vollenbröker, 'Deafening Architectural Modernism: Reconsidering the Archive of Adolf Loos', in Jenifer L. Barclay and Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy (eds.), *Cripping the Archive: Disability, History, and Power* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2025).
29. Cf. Liebermann, *Architecture's Disability Problem*, pp.55-76.
30. Nirmala Erevelles. 'Educating Unruly Bodies: Critical Pedagogy, Disability Studies, and the Politics of Schooling', *Educational Theory*, 50.1 (March 2000), 25-47 (25).
31. Gissen, *The Architecture of Disability*, p. 140.
32. See Solomon Zewolde, Adam Walls, Tania Sengupta, Catalina Ortiz, Yasminah Beebeejaun, George Burridge, and Kamna Patel, *'Race' and Space: What is 'Race' Doing in a Nice Field Like the Built Environment?* (London: The Bartlett, UCL Faculty of the Built Environment, 2020). Online at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/sites/bartlett/files/race_and_space_pdf_final.pdf> [accessed 28 November 2024].
33. Liebermann, *Architecture's Disability Problem*, p. 198 (emphasis in the original).

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## Competing interests
The authors declare none.

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CAPTIONS
1 Olof Hanson, Charles Thompson Memorial Hall, 1916: one of the first deaf-centred public building design in the USA, photographed October 2012.
2 Maria Kramer, extension to a home in north London, 2020, including a swimming pool for KP, a client who lives with Multiple Sclerosis and uses a wheelchair.
3 Kenneth Cranham as the titular character in Florian Zeller's *The Father*, performed at the Wyndham's Theatre, London, 5 October 2015. Living with dementia, the protagonist struggles to reorient his experience as the flat around him subtly changes from one scene to the next.

WEB ABSTRACT
In this opening introduction, the curators of this special issue of **arq** situate the collected papers in the wider ecology of architectural publishing around deafness, disability, and neurodiversity in architecture. They explore the significant role that

thematic journal issues like this can play in advancing disciplinary discussions, occupying a middle ground between the in-depth discussions of monographs and the tentative related findings of conference papers. Theoretical and historical threads are identified which connect this volume with existing scholarship on the imbrication of architecture with diverse bodyminds, discussing implications for the future of architectural practice, research, and pedagogy.