Disability Heritage: Participatory and Transformative Engagement

Key Issues in Heritage Studies, Routledge

Call for Proposals, April 2024

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Call for Proposals:
Disability is “everywhere and nowhere” in heritage.¹ Even in settings where disability is obviously embedded, as in collections and sites associated with war, medicine, and industry, the experiences of disabled people often go unacknowledged or uncritically presented in the service of another story. When they are included, their stories have often been pushed to the margins. Framing disabled people in this way, as a small (yet diverse) group separate from mainstream society, ignores the mutual constitution of the categories of disability and able-bodied or neurotypical and neurodivergent, and minimizes the presence and contribution of disabled people throughout history and across society. By reinforcing boundaries between the disabled and the non-disabled, such an approach not only obscures the ways we are connected, but furthermore contributes to disability illegibility in heritage and history, as well as to enduring stigma and ableism.

The inclusion of cultural participation in the 2008 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities generated widespread attention to disability in the heritage sector.² The majority of this work has focused on museums, and primarily on accessibility, with a smaller but expanding emphasis on the representation of disabled lives in collections and exhibitions, and among a diversified staff.³ Yet more radical participatory approaches have the potential to transform heritage at every level, from institutions, people and practices to events, archives, and memories. The proposed volume moves beyond existing work to consider a broader range of cultural contexts, including archives, monuments, (in)visible cultural heritage such as art and performance, and the built environment, and to address preservation, participation, and engagement rather than the more common focus on heritage consumption.


Building on existing scholarship and concepts such as “inclusive capital,” “archival autonomy,” “disability gain,” and “crip technoscience,” chapters will critically analyse the benefits and challenges of embedding disability perspectives and examine the impact on heritage, organisations, and career trajectories. The collection will demonstrate the wide relevance of disability history and its traces across all forms of heritage, from archeological, industrial, military, medical, and educational to cultural, digital, and intangible.

The editors are particularly interested in submissions from disabled authors and co-authored chapters where heritage professionals and artists, activists, and representatives of disability organisations reflect critically on the theme. Scholarly essays, for example analysing heritage concepts or trends, are also welcome. The volume is international in scope and aims for intersectional analyses.

Possible topics include:
- transforming and transformative heritage
- erasure in heritage collections and sites
- at-risk materials, spaces, and histories
- strategies for intervening and challenging misrepresentation
- processes and products of co-creation and community-building
- training, mentoring, and leadership work
- integrating feminist or healthcare perspectives with critical disability studies approaches
- crip heritage
- embodied heritage engagement
- heritage activism, including interventions, happenings, and protest
- contested heritage/institutional heritage/dark heritage

Timeline:
Chapter proposals due 15 June 2024: 500 words (not including references)
To be submitted along with a brief biographical statement, via email to m.s.parry@uva.nl and l.vangoidsenhoven@uva.nl with the subject heading “DISABILITY HERITAGE PROPOSAL.” Respondents will be notified of the editors’ decision by 15 July 2024.

First full chapter drafts due 1 December 2024: 6500 words (including references)
Returned with feedback from the editors by the end of January 2025. Revised chapters will then be due with 2-4 months, depending on the extent of suggested revisions.

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