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## Summer Roundup: Inhabitable Worlds, Part One

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By Deanna Day

Continuing our summer roundups, today we are highlighting a first set of essays from our [Inhabitable Worlds](#) series, brought to us by editors [Michele Friedner](#) and [Emily Cohen](#). Inhabitable Worlds is a series that examines the theoretical tools and approaches that scholars bring to the study of disability in the social sciences and humanities.

### [Introduction](#)

#### **Inhabitable Worlds: Troubling disability, debility, and ability narratives**

*“In approaching bodies and senses through the lens of inhabitable worlds, we aim to further inquire into age-old scholarly investigations about embodiment to think through a current fascination with the senses and to trouble social categories such as ‘disability,’ ‘debility,’ and ‘ability.’ Grappling with narratives about bodily function and the senses, we propose a series where scholars go beyond the binaries of ability and disability, and capacity and incapacity, to understand the body and senses as being volatile, unstable, and in flux. This series focuses on inhabitable worlds both as an alternative to and a mode to think through medical concepts of rehabilitation and habilitation. Medical discourses shape the ways people come to experience bodily difference; people also transform these discourses through political advocacy and personal tactics they develop to navigate the material realities of bodily differences and built environments.”*

—Michele Friedner and Emily Cohen



Accra Rehab Centre (2010). Photograph courtesy of James E. O'Neal.

### [On the Worlding of Accra's Rehabilitation Training Centre](#)

*“Many Ghanaian ‘disables’ (a term used by people with disabilities in Accra to refer to themselves) consider ‘The Centre’ to be a critical locale in their ongoing movement toward greater accessibility and fulfillment of their rights. It can be used, therefore, almost as an archaeological site, or an archive, in our excavations of disability world history... To highlight this archive’s original and ongoing dynamic of translocality and globalization, this essay emphasizes a kind of vortical flow I imagine enlivening The Centre over many decades. That is, centripetal forces have brought people from near and far to work on disability issues, and centrifugal forces have sent Ghanaian ‘disables’ out in a far flung manner to play wheelchair basketball in New York City, to earn masters degrees in places such as Vermont, to perform in dance concerts in Germany and Spain, and so forth. To point to The Centre’s translocality means resisting methodological nationalism and instead tracing various disability-oriented populations that have circulated trans-nationally and helped to create the dynamism of this site.” —Kathryn Linn Geurts*



University of Missouri student protest preparations. Photo Credit: Mizzou's Official Facebook album

### [Policing at the Synapse: Ferguson, Race, and the Disability Politics of the Teen Brain](#)

*“Neuroparenting attempts to humanize teenagers by explaining their emotionality or waywardness through ‘politically-neutral’ neuroscientific truths and metaphors of disability. Yet this not only essentializes adolescence as negative but also reinforces associations of psychiatric disability (‘brain damage’ or ‘temporary insanity’) with impulsivity and threat, which endanger youth and disabled people in encounters with police. Robin Bernstein persuasively argues that the exclusion of black youth from childhood innocence has been central to its formation since the nineteenth century. ‘Diagnostic regimes,’ such as IQ tests, were devised in the early 20th century as a eugenic tactic to identify and segregate ‘unfit’ (read: nonwhite, disabled, or poor) students, and neuroparenting forms another chapter in this story, as white innocence continues to be bolstered by ableist biological essentialism (i.e. the incapacity of ‘disabling’ adolescence) as well as racist accounts of the congenital criminal predisposition of nonwhite youth.” —Julie Passanante Elman*

### [Making Disability Count: Demography, Futurity, and the Making of](#)



## [Disability Publics](#)

*“While legislation mandates inclusion of people with disabilities in civic culture, there is still a lack of recognition for people with disabilities not only in the present but also as part of an anticipated future. Our research addresses this concern, and also attends to emerging sites of possibility, which often combine the physical, cultural and political...Most researchers who ‘count disability’ — demographers, statisticians, economists — are rarely in dialogue with scholars in disability studies, whose concern has been to show how ‘disability counts’ across a range of qualitative fields. We have interviewed a handful of demographers whose work engages this situation. In our discussions, we have learned that demonstrating the significance of the dramatic increase in numbers can be difficult.”* —Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp



Wheelchair basketball practice in Cuenca, Ecuador

## [“The Chair is Our Feet:” Imagining Habitable Worlds in Highland Ecuador](#)

*“Through my observations and participation in this weekly wheelchair basketball practice, I gained insight into how technology becomes deeply intertwined with everyday embodied*

*experience among people with physical disabilities in highland Ecuador. While these athletes came from different socioeconomic and professional backgrounds — they were an appliance factory technician, a photo store owner, a fast food worker, a street entrepreneur, for example — the camaraderie they shared as competitive athletes following recovery from a serious injury cut across ethnic and class boundaries. Most striking was how their athletic performance signaled a particular type of masculinity through engagement with new technologies and bodily practices. Wheelchair sports provided an outlet for these athletes to demonstrate their masculinity by aggressively competing against and cooperating with other men. For me, the basketball court offered an intriguing site to explore how wheelchair athletes reconfigured the capabilities of their bodies.”*—Nicholas Rattray

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