

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

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## ***Canadian Journal of Disability Studies***

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## **Virtual Poster Series (ViP) #1: Traffic Lights**

Presented by the m.i.a Collective

Arseli Dokumaci, Laurence Parent, Kim Sawchuk, art direction and text;

Antonia Hernández, graphics and interactive design

<http://mia.mobilities.ca/posters/index3.html>

### **Introduction**

The first set of posters, which we will launch in tandem with the Crippling Cyberspace exhibition, profiles work undertaken by the m.i.a. collective that addresses “architectural ableism.” This first of a series of virtual posters deals with the "spatial enunciations" of the urban environment in relationship to the barriers, simultaneously physical and virtual, which prohibit people with physical disabilities from participating in civic life, on and off line.

Playing with the genre of the poster, we have created “Traffic Lights” where each of the 3 colours of the lights - Red, Yellow, Green- are used to present an inter-related triptych of m.i.a work. Each illuminated, animated square acts as a portal that allow internet browsers, lurkers, and researchers to access our media content: Red takes you to a set of five video capsules titled *Architectural Ableism*; Yellow to *Montreal\*in/accessible* and the Megafone website replete with geo-locational photographs taken by project participants; Green to the first in a video series by Laurence Parent called *Crippling the Landscape*.

### **The Virtual Poster**

The 2-D graphics of the ViP series avail themselves of the potential of the internet as a distributional, iterative medium: static graphics become animated, hyperlinked GIFs written in HTML code. The posters produced can be reproduced in print, but they live most comfortably in

"cyberspace". They are connected to projects produced by the m.i.a collective that are themselves networked. We believe in flexible collaborations that allow us to work in alliance with different artists and organizations, such as the Québec disability rights group, RAPLIQ or artists, such as Antoni Abad. The sounds and images are meant to circulate, make the rounds, are amenable to different 'platforms' from Facebook to Twitter to Instagram to YouTube to Vimeo, and are subject to change over time. The 'digital assets' are mutable and move.

In this way, the goal of the ViP series is to profile the links between the real and the virtual, but also between media genres from different epochs and eras. The graphic design for this series pays perverse homage to Kazimir Malevich's suprematist squares, as well as to the "carré rouge" movement in our home town of Montreal. The ViP series is didactic creative research that intervenes in the current mediascape presenting research as process, performance, as "media in action".

### **RED SQUARE:**

Inspired by our initial collaboration with Antoni Abad, and working in collaboration with the activist group RAPLIQ ([www.rapliq.org](http://www.rapliq.org)) the m.i.a. video capsules, *Architectural Ableism*, were initiated, scripted and co-produced with a group of Montreal\*in/accessible participants.

Participants selected 5 different locations in the city of Montreal to detail the ways that movement through these spaces have been laid out. In many cases, access is promised, but not delivered.

These "capsules" have been edited down to lengths that are short, approximately 5 minutes each. This is so that they can be distributed easily through the web, viewed on multiple devices, used in classrooms, shown in festivals, be discussed. Intervene. The capsules also disrupt the language

barriers in cyberspace. The capsules are produced in French. They are sub-titled in English. The sound track for the videos, by Ben Spencer, is derived from the sounds made by the wheelchairs of the participants as they traverse the urban landscape. They will be subtitled in French as well, over the coming months. We would like them to be translated into more languages. Our intention is to make them accessible to those who have either a visual or hearing impairment.

### **YELLOW SQUARE:**

This part of the triptych highlights the participation of m.i.a. in Barcelona artist, Antoni Abad's Canal Accessible website and 'Megafone project' ([www.zexe.net](http://www.zexe.net)). For the past year, a group of disabled participants have been engaged in mapping and photographing the city of Montreal, pointing out the proliferation of barriers that scream at every turn "do not enter" and "you are not welcome." The maps make visible the profound inhabitability of our cities for those with physical disabilities. To date, over 2000 contributions to the maps have been made by 8 participants. As this is a user-generated project, the map thickens and changes regularly. Abad's "canal accessible," a web channel, has acted as a platform for a suite of projects with people often marginalized or misrepresented in the mainstream news. Megafone is an open source vehicle for social change. Our collective has assisted in the production of content for the map, and to the upgrading of the Megafone software, developed by Antoni Abad in collaboration with programmer Matteo Sisti Sette. This section of the poster provides a direct link to this website, which is constantly changing.

### **GREEN SQUARE:**

This last square, *Crip City*, features a thirteen minute video filmed and edited by Laurence

Parent. The video chronicles the five kilometer journey, which originally took thirty-five minutes from the University of Laval to the train station in Québec City. Using a “herocam” attached to her wheel chair, Parent takes you on a trip from a to b from the point of view of her wheel chair, exposing the “rugosities” (to quote Brazilian geographer Milton Santos) of this route, indicating moments of danger as she wends her way home. Titled *Crippling the Landscape 1: Québec City*, the video brings you through this movement-space. By crippin' the landscape Parent intends to impair the functioning of ableism, to damage and make defective the structures of power which contribute to reinforce the normalcy of ableist architecture.

**On m.i.a:**

m.i.a is a collective of artists and researchers who work from the home base of the Mobile Media Lab, located in the Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, Montreal ([www.mobilities.ca](http://www.mobilities.ca)) The letters m.i.a. are intentionally polysemous: from “missing in action” to “media in action”, this assemblage of people, networks, devices, platforms and formats are engaged in the disruption of the "able-ist" value systems and discourses that haunt the virtual corridors of cyberspace as well as life on the streets.

Cyberspace is not a new utopia. Cyberspace is not disembodied.

Our research/creation projects are meant to use cyberspace as a means to instigate social change in the real world, which in itself is a 'virtual world' ripe with potential but often stuck in discriminatory practices embedded in the environments we navigate daily. If as Michel de Certeau says, "civic engagement" is connected to "spatial enunciations" then what are our cities telling us? Who do they speak for? How might we respond, back in articulate, creative, angry and joyous ways that instigate transformations that lead to greater inclusivity both here and there,

on line and off? These are the questions, as a collective, that drive our projects forward.

We are passionate. We are angry. We are joyful. We want change.

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