

Artist's Statement: "Do You Like This Installation?"

Cassandra Hartblay

Do You Like This Installation? is an interactive art project that has both online and material interfaces. It is composed of three components: (1) a material installation in a gallery space, (2) an interactive online interface and (3) data analysis. The project grows out of 11 months of fieldwork studying social inclusion and disability in the city of Petrozavodsk in northwestern Russia. As an ethnographer interested in the lived experience of people with disabilities, I found an unexpected richness in the ways that crip movement in cyberspace was intertwined with barriers and access in the material world.

In order to explore these interdependencies of embodied and cybernetic access, I chose to highlight the act of voting.

Voting is an apt focus for two reasons - first, because of its symbolic importance as a distillation of political participation, and second because of it offers a literal illustration of how barriers and access affect us all. Casting a vote is a metonymic act – that is, it is an act that is simultaneously constitutive of its own meaning, and symbolic of a larger idea, i.e. democratic participation. Casting a vote is a classical marker of democracy. In ancient Greece, white male landowners – those included in the democratic “we” – would walk across a forum, and drop a stone into a vessel symbolizing the candidate they wished to side with. Today, voting still requires moving through space to reach a particular place where a vote may officially be cast through a performative gesture. Democratic participation is particularly fraught in Russia, where “free and fair elections” are watched by the international community and judged as harbingers of progress or repression.

This installation invites its audience "participate" - to cast a vote. It poses a question about how people navigate or redesign physical and virtual terrain as they participate in the voting process - or chose not to participate. How might the design of election processes might preclude or proffer particular results? How might voters foil these biases? What can crip perspectives can tell us about the politics of participation, understood as disabled and non-disabled movement in and between the physical and virtual worlds?