

*transcript***F_PODCAST starting from difference with Zoe Partington and Jos Boys
From the DisOrdinary Architecture Project**

Zoe Partington: ... Or a blind person may think about—I don't know – sections in a very different way to a sighted person. Or maybe they think about it in the same way... It's just that no one's ever actually had those conversations. ...

(fem_arc intro)
fitting and misfitting

designing to enable people not to misfit

start from difference rather than add difference

(field recordings: underground slowing down, announcement “the next station is Euston”, announcement “if you see something that doesn’t look right...”, loud traffic noise, bus passing by)

Ana: we just arrived at London Euston station and now we're crossing the Street to meet Jos Boys and Zoe Partington. We're meeting them at the friends meeting house, a non-commercial working space

(field recordings: greeting Jos waiting in front of the building, traffic fading out, entering cafeteria, people chatting)

Jos Boys: So, I start?

Zoe Partington: Yes okay.

J: My name is Jos Boys. I've been working in the field of architecture in a very wide-ranging way for I guess 50 years in that I studied architecture in the 1970s and 80s and was very involved in some feminist architecture work at that time through a practice called Matrix. So, we were really interested in how you might understand how space was gendered at a time when that wasn't even up for discussion as something that you talked about.

And since then I worked in a variety of different ways in a variety of different places. And as a single parent I was... you know, I worked as a teacher in architecture schools so that I was earning a proper living. But mainly I've freelanced and done a variety of different things including writing and different sorts of community-based practice.

And with Zoe, who will introduce herself too, over 10 years ago we set up something that at that time was called Architecture Inside Out with the idea that disability, access, and inclusion was still really badly dealt with within architectural education and practice. And that by using the creativity of disabled artists, we could really provoke new ways of working that were both very subversive but also very enjoyable.

Z: Hi, I'm Zoe Partington. And I suppose I came into architecture probably 25 – 30 years ago as I did ... I studied a post graduate diploma in the history of art, design, architecture, and philosophy and one of the reasons for doing that was I'd done a qualification before which was very practical but the history and the context: lots of things were missing from that, which I really wanted to know about. So, I did this sort of heritage and history side to find out more. And as part of that I suppose as a disabled person and as a person with sight loss I began to realize there were lots of gaps in the way that I was being taught but also in the way that things were designed or developed. And I didn't see any role models or any blind or partially sighted people, or female blind or partially sighted people studying or developing architecture. So, I sort of became in a way accidentally quite fascinated by it.

I'd always done creative things as an artist, but I then moved into working in a very structured way with organizations in London auditing and creating guidance around inclusive architecture, inclusive design, built spaces, buildings. And it very much came in line with the Disability Discrimination Act at that time. And because of that I began to realize that people have been doing this for quite a long time and not much was changing. So, again I began to challenge it and question it. And maybe because I was an artist, or I got a slightly different background to some of the access auditors and specialists I worked with... and all the people I worked with weren't disabled people as well. That was also quite interesting. So, I began to have lots of questions and look at it in a very different way. And then, yes, then we met, didn't we, to help develop set up architecture inside out which was really about to look at how disabled artists may be able to influence changes in the built environment, in spaces and again to critically map things and to look at things in very different ways.

I suppose we've been on that 10-year journey, haven't we, trying to develop how we continue to embed that type of approach, which is more sort of moving away from: guidance is important, but it doesn't answer everything. And guidance changes as things change and society moves and people's opinions.

J: ... And the guidance is very technical and functional and clinical.

Z: Yeah ... it's not about people really.

J: It's become this thing, which stands for kind of disabled people as a category.

Z: Yes

J: Coming from architectural practice and education the whole atmosphere of it being kind of boring, politically correct, something you do at the end of your studies.

Z: Yes, and it's never evaluated with disabled people that use the space or spatially how that might work or not work.

(greeting in background)

J: Sorry, one of the artists that we've worked with years ago.

Oceané: Actually, what you say is quite true like I have the feeling that in architecture school we're just designing shapes. And later when we go into offices or work it is like: Okay, we have norms and we have to follow some process. But we actually don't think about it. During our architecture studies we don't think about it. It's never open this topic.

J: There's a really interesting disability studies scholar called Jay Dolmage – there's a lot of really exciting work in disability studies that doesn't really get into architectural educational practice – and he calls it retrofitting! So, this is this very odd thing, which is you learn to design for "normal people" and then you add on stuff for the kind of abnormal.

O: ...or you take out.

J: So, it's kind of... it's built in as an afterthought and certainly it sounds like your experience is the same. When you get taught design that's exactly what's assumed: It's like not that important. It's something that you can deal with when you go into practice. A rather dull subject that you just need to know like you need to know fire regulations. Completely dehumanizing.

Lara: Yeah, because you start with the Neufert or you start with the Modulor. You start with all these normative, idealized bodies.

J: You get all these ergonomic figures that are themselves quite problematic where they came from. And there are still I think really important histories to be written about kind of the development of notions of ideals or norms, averages. And there's real connections between those

ergonomic studies and eugenics. I mean there are real connections about trying to have this kind of normal / ideal type, which you're kind of... they're not achievable. None of us are average

Z: Well with DisOrdinary Architecture we're trying to look at how you really embed it as if it's in somebody's DNA. About how they then bring that into everything that they do. Not necessarily in a disability specific way, it's not about that, but it's about understanding the varieties of people that may use a space or environment. And understanding how you might work with a disabled person to look at it in a completely different way that actually might be better. But it takes quite a long time, doesn't it, to get people to think in that way. And I think now we started to practice, or we've used workshops in quite interesting ways, and you can begin to see the change, I think, in some of those students that we've been working with.

I think also there's something else that's happening that younger people are now exposed to more disabled people because as things get more accessible more disabled people become visible. So, people that have been isolated are now not so isolated anymore. So, people are beginning to question, aren't they, and challenge what is this norm and how might we really think about it or address it differently.

J: Yeah, and I do think that, you know, things like gender fluidity are kind of moved to being much more relaxed about gender binaries and even gay lesbian type boundaries just to get much more relaxed about how fluid our identities and kind of ways of being in the world are. Taking that into disability and impairment for younger people, who find that much more just the way of thinking about things. It's kind of easier. When we start talking about disability in that way it's something that's quite... that's very variable and creatively interesting in that variety. I think they get it a bit more.

L: So, you think the system that more disabled people enter the mainstream educational system has changed the notion of normality a bit?

Z: Again, it has for children and young people. Whether it has for the teachers I'm not so sure. The mainstream school system is still very difficult for disabled people to flourish within it if the right setup isn't in place and the right framework. But there is a framework and there is legislation, there is law.

L: And there's like assistance or teachers are trained?

Z: You'd hope that, yeah. Ideally, yes. But sometimes they're still not trained in a way that they should be, to make sure that the disabled person isn't still the object of: everything's not working because of that person.

It's still very important to try and get the schools to understand how to, you know, how to change the system and the framework. That that's the issue. That's where the barriers are. Not within that individual disabled person that comes into that mainstream school. I mean we talk about this within architecture, don't we, and I have to say it's a lot of male architects that I have been talking to recently. We'll talk about designing environments and that we have to design these environments for the masses because that's how we make things work. And we keep having these discussions around that able-bodied people can survive in any terrain in a way. So, actually as a designer if you create not very good design, non-disabled people can still use that building and that space. They might not like it. But you're definitely excluding disabled people. And you should be thinking about, you know, that 6%, the 8%, the 10%. Because if you get that right and you work to make sure that those people can access it – and it's the same in education in the schools – then it will work for everybody. And it would actually be better for everybody. But really trying to push that nugget and get people to understand that can still be quite difficult, I think. And people will argue for hours about it and I'm thinking: it's not that hard a sort of model to understand.

J: I agree and part of the thing about the DisOrdinary Architecture Project is to try and think of ways... if you argue that you should start from difference rather than add difference at the end as a kind of artificial thing, what does that mean in terms of the kinds of teaching that you do? The kinds of activities that you do. The workshops? How it affects how people literally learn the

subject again. Not just: You need to know this about disabled people, but how you think about the world and your place and the place of other people in it. And some of the language that I use again from disability studies is around the idea of fitting and misfitting rather than, you know, able-bodied and disabled. But different sorts of environments act in different ways, in different contexts. It's always relational. It's always about who you're with, what the space is like, what the attitudes are like, all those things come together in a relational way to disable or enable particular groups of people and not others. And because we have a society that goes on discriminating against disabled people.

L: Which is the social model of disability...

J: Well, it is the social model, but I think in a way there's been.... the social model is still really important and one of the things we do – and Zoe does this a lot – one of the things we do is explain the social model, which a lot of people don't know. But a lot of this contemporary work by people like Alison Kafer, who talk more about what they call a relational model. The social model I think is really important, the idea that it is the relationship between disabled people and the societies and how societies frame it. But the relational model tends to say: that's very dynamic. That depends on all sorts of things at once. Not just disability, but gender, race, class, all those things. And that it's specific and it's situated.

So, you need to understand what's going on there. And that if you think about misfitting as a very creative thing – even though often it's, you know, forced upon disabled people – but if you think of it as a creative thing... if you're designing to enable people not to misfit then that's a real creative generator! That's not a problem. That's not a kind of leftover. It's what you start from. So, you don't get into this numbers game like: it's not very important because there aren't many people who use a wheelchair. You get into: what's the neuro and biodiversity, the richness of it, the value of it in our world. And how, if you think about those sorts of ways of existing, then how do you really support those.

Z: Yeah, and I think that's the thing, because what it does is – and this is why we want obviously a lot more disabled people to be training in architecture or visibly training in architecture and design. And then getting employed in the architectural sector – because that's the other issue, isn't it, about that transfer from education then into work... is that this whole flipside that, if a disabled person is designing and developing and controlling it, aesthetically it just becomes a very different way of designing those spaces and thinking about those spaces. A very small thing sometimes can actually change it. But it's also about people realizing that the same people aren't just wheelchair users. It's this huge spectrum of disabled people with different impairments. And how do we get people to open up to think: This is much bigger than just people with mobility impairments or wheelchair users? Things still incredibly valid! But it's much wider than that. And that means more people in society have access and need to make sure that it's right really.

L: One thing I really liked in the phone call we did beforehand is the shift from feminism, away from your feminist practice Matrix and the discussions you had there, that you said disabled studies had like a language already prepared for difference. Compared to feminism that at that time didn't have that language.

J: I think that what we do is a form of feminist practice, but I don't think that's a way we ever talked about it. And that's partly because it's almost like you can go beyond some of the things that we got very caught up in in the 70s and the 80s. The things that were really important were – being able to just work out what it meant to say that space was gendered or racialized or queered or, you know, all those things all disabling. There was a kind of interest in that, but for me – it may be different for Zoe – I think there's been some really fantastic stuff by contemporary disability studies scholars and disabled activists and artists, which is around the idea that we're all after the same thing! It is all about you know the expression is transformative social spatial and material justice! And the notion of justice rather than access and inclusion for me is a really powerful one. Because it does include power. And if you start talking about spatial justice and spatial and material justice you're thinking particularly about architecture – I feel like that it's not so much that you have feminism and then you add intersectionality... it is that you have a way of working which brings together feminists and disability scholars and you know queer scholars. It's like it's all being

interested in the same end. And then what you have to do in order to get there, is exactly what Zoe was talking about: It is about what are the everyday practices and spaces and relationships that make things gendered or make them discriminate against particular people, disable particular people. And that's across the board you know.

You can't just say: oh well, ...certain things will happen to certain sorts of women to do with their place in society. But once you start cross-cutting it with impairment, with sexuality, with race, it's kind of.... it feels to me like it's better to look at the practices and see what they're doing to all of us! Not to say "I'm a feminist" or "I'm a queer scholar"...

Z: I agree, and I think... with the social model of disability the thinking in the 70s what was really fascinating was to really start to look at how disabled people, impairment groups, were segregated into each impairment group. So, people were working separately and against each other. And that was convenient for other people because that meant that those minorities couldn't work as a majority to change things. And then I think people began to realize, disabled people began to realize, it was not a useful way forward for disabled people. But to come together as a bigger group was going to give people more power and be more informative to other people. And I think again somewhere along the line I think for some disabled people they've sort of got trapped in that. And not thought about the next stage about how do we also then include other people that may be finding that they're dealing with barriers or missed opportunities for different reasons, but in a very similar way! How do we work together to try and remove them much faster and with more majority really? And I think that's when it becomes quite interesting and you really do start to – which I think you do see in young people, because they are having much more conversations about this than I ever did as a younger person. And we know that it creates better environments for everybody! Like you say that's social justice. Those spaces are for everybody. They're not just for one set of people, which some obviously are at the moment... (laughing)

J: Yes, yeah, and I think the other thing about it is that – again just talking about it in the more kind of theoretical framework that's being developed and within disability activism and scholarship as well as art practice – is that part of it is also accepting that there isn't kind of a solution. It's not like all you need to do is this and then it will be wonderful for women. Or it'll be wonderful for disabled people. It is that whatever you do it's gonna go on being complex and contradictory and it's never going to work for everybody. And that what you're trying to do is just move towards it being better for the most disadvantaged people. And that it is something that can only be....

Z: It doesn't stop! I think that's the thing, isn't it, and then one package is just not going to suit everybody, and it doesn't fix it for even those individuals. It's about how to keep developing, I think.

J: You're accepting that. You're bringing that into it and letting it just be part of what you do. And not be kind of worried that you're going to end up with contradictions in what suits people. And you're trying to resolve them.

(short pause)

L: So, as we already heard in our recordings, we are in this very lively place here. You said you regularly meet here.

J: When you asked about where we meet and where or whether we have an office and all that: we don't have an office. We're very much an informal platform and I think even when we get more consolidated, which is what we're in the process of doing now, we still don't need an office, because people are based around the country. And at the moment this particular road, the Euston Road, which runs west-east across this top half of central London is a really good kind of zone for us, because we're doing stuff at the British Library, we're doing stuff at the Bartlett School of Architecture, stations that Zoe and other colleagues come in to, other artists come in to: Euston, Kings Cross, St Pancras, Marylebone, they're all on that road. So, we find that there are also quite a lot of really interesting public buildings, where we have our meetings. There's a GPS place that we go to, cause it has a public cafe and there's this Quakers friend's house.

What I like about the Quaker building is that it's quite old-fashioned, it's very open, it's not somewhere, where you have to have a cup of tea or a cup of coffee. The Quakers are definitely

people, who in their own way have believed in social, spatial, material justice for a very long time. People do come and sit here because it's quiet, it's public, nobody's going to send them away. We come usually because it does have quiet places... It turns out that what I thought was a quiet place today isn't a quiet place.

(loud noise: metal bowls falling on floor. Then cut to field recordings from Bartlett year end show)

L: Do you want to talk about the architecture beyond sight project, which is what you do in the audio tour tonight at the Bartlett school? How do you bring your ideas into this project?

Z: The architect beyond sight project has come out of a relationship with Bartlett, hasn't it? That we've been, well and Jos has definitely been developing for quite some time. So, it's come out of having more talks, representation with disabled people coming to talk about the work that they do with the architecture students and design students. Not just at the Bartlett but at other architecture schools as well. The Dean Allen Penn at the Bartlett School of Architecture was also very interested because he'd met a blind architect and he began to think particularly about architecture. About how it's taught in a very visual way. And he started to question that, didn't he? And then came to DisOrdinary Architecture to look at how we might address some of that by making opportunities for blind or partially sighted people to be part of the student intake. So, to be undergraduates and to be... and it can be at any level. It's not necessarily only at one level. So, this is really a big start, a big journey, to try and change practices and to look at how that's possible.

We did a three-day pilot course, didn't we, last year. We tried to look at how the courses or modules might be shaped. Who within those structures that exist within the universities need to get involved to begin to unpick their thinking?

Last year was interesting because suddenly blind or partially sighted people were visible within that architecture school and very very quickly people could begin to see how you might do things in a different way. You know, purely because maybe for guide dog users would turn up to the project. Or a blind person may think about – I don't know – sections in a very different way to a sighted person. Or maybe they think about it in the same way it's just that no one's ever actually had those conversations! And slightly tweaking things could make that possible. And I think that was really interesting, wasn't it, for us.

J: One of the things I think was really valuable about this initial three-day workshop, is that it was a mixture of blind and partially sighted artists, architects, Mandy, who was working with us, who's a writer, as well as sighted architecture students and tutors.

And so in working together doing a kind of very quick one-day design project it was really enlightening to see the variety of ways in which people shared how you map a built space, how you represent it, and how you communicate what you've done.

The artists showed us techniques for example of sewing or how easy it is to make a tactile line by just using a rubber mat. So, one group shared their drawings, where they were sketching on one side on the mat and then flipping it over, so it made a tactile edge. So, you could very quickly share a sketch.

Carlos Pereira, who's the blind architect who came from Portugal to work with us, showed how he cut and folded card in really interesting ways. So, he did a kind of three-dimensional model making. You could see him imagining what the space would be like. And he also talked about how he does site visits which was really interesting because it was about how you use touch and a very slow engagement with the place, with the smell, and the atmosphere. So, his site visits take 2 or 3 days of just really concentrated engagement with the space. And that felt like a really beautiful thing to do, that felt like something that be really nice for all architecture students to do to me.

Mandy and Charlie, who she was working with, they did a kind of performative... they performed the site. So, they were performing what they imagined designing in it and they were walking around it as if what they built was there and talking about it.

Zoe you also did some audio description. We talked about whether you could design a building just by using words. Yeah, could you do it, if you could describe it well enough, so somebody could draw it up. And there's kind of an idea: well if you can't do the CAD stuff then you can't do it. But in fact, there's two things about that. One is lots of very famous architects, they just have the

concept and they have other people who draw it up for them. And I think the other thing is with the way that kind of online drawing is developing... so example: we found somebody, who's worked for Richard Rodgers, who indeed has sight loss and has never really told anybody. She's worked her way through architecture school. She's partially sighted and she's worked for very high-powered practices and she finds that the computer based parametrics and that sort of thing really works to her with her particular impairment. So, it feels like there are a range of methods that allow you to...

Z: ...and I think that's been the important thing it's about how you then translate. So, if someone has an incredibly good idea or approach to something, how that's developed I'm not sure it matters, but then it's how you translate it to other people around you to make it work really. And that was something I think came out quite well last year. And then also you were talking about audio description: we know when we've used audio description with students that people begin to look at space much more! They observe it more. And they begin to see things, that they've always walked past and missed. And just through changing literally from visual sketching or to using the computer they suddenly have to. I don't know, the space becomes more real somehow and they engage with it. And I think that's important for everybody not just for blind or partially sighted people. And that's when I think it becomes more interesting, because it isn't about blind people at that point. It's about communication, it's about observing, it's just about real issues, isn't it? That you're there as a person designing for other people.

O: it's really about like understanding in which kind of space you are and how people use it.

J: Yeah. And how kind of orthographic drawings, you begin to realize, how much it leaves out! Because how do you describe smell in orthographic drawing? You don't! And how do you.... and ergonomic drawing too. I did a very brief project with the Glasgow School of Art with first year students there, where they did start with ergonomic drawings and then we looked at what the limitations were. And they began to do drawings of the experience of having an impairment in different situations. And they immediately saw that they couldn't really represent the things that mattered. They couldn't. If they were representing somebody, who was partially sighted then they couldn't capture you know navigating by sound or they didn't have a mechanism for the things that really counted. So, that became an exciting thing about how they might extend the ways in which they observe, engage, map, draw space.

L: You work with a lot of different artists, Jos told us. Maybe you describe a bit about your network.

Z: Well, since the seventies and since the social model of disability there's been a development of disabled artist having the opportunities and the voices and funding really to develop their practice. And that's grown a lot around 2012. Just before then we started working as architecture inside out, but around 2012 with the Paralympics and the Cultural Olympia program, because opportunities have opened and people are actually listening, engaging, and pushing funding to disabled artists, a lot of those artists went off, didn't they, doing a lot of other projects. Live real projects, which is fantastic. And it's now we're really beginning to work... those people have been away and develop their practice quite a lot. And all of those people are now coming back and working with us. And we've kept in touch with those people as they've been developing their practice in different ways and in different countries, with different people. And I think those people now have really begun to understand about architecture, built environment, space. They're very aware of mapping spaces, using their creative techniques to do that. So, that might be using drawing, more illustration to map spaces, to have a discussion and engagement about it. It might be using binaural sound. So, we worked with Joseph Young quite a lot. He'll work around mapping and thinking about the spaces through the sounds that you hear in those spaces. And that's binaural sound, so it seems like it's real, that you're actually there. And it just develops really good dialogue and good conversations. And I think of some of the other artists we work with, they've been working in the architecture schools, they've been listening to the type of approaches the tutors and the students are using. They're beginning to see where the gaps are. So, they're developing their practice in different ways. They're much richer than say 10 years ago when we started, isn't it?

And it's one thing Jos and I have been talking about: it's trying to get funding. So, that we can... because through some of the projects, we've worked with disabled artists and architects and brought them together to work in teams – any small teams, of sort of four: Two architects and two disabled artists – to develop live projects. And it's then beginning to understand, you know, artists have a different language to architects and maybe designers. But if you can begin to understand the language between you you can just begin to make better decisions about how you might create something.

And I think one of the things I've really observed is that it is about that collaboration. So, me as a disabled artist, you know, I might have an opinion or a way of doing things. But working with an architect and if the two of you can reflect and develop your practice together then the outcome is much better for both of you really!

We've had chance I think to be able to develop that. And now we're trying to capture it. And just what we talk about, because we're capturing it a lot more to try and understand what works, what doesn't work, what needs developing further.

O: It's interesting to hear for us that you're always learning somehow. Because we have the feeling that actually through all the interviews and input we have: it's always about collaboration somehow. Like when you create those spaces where the students and the artists can work together. I think we are quite interested in the infrastructure. And you talked about this snowballing effect. Like that in order to make this space, you need funding, you need a good network of people that are engaged with it. Maybe you can tell us a bit more about it. And about how broad you are, like you're not London centric. You've been working in many universities and you have artists from everywhere.

J: Yeah, so with the network of disabled artists what's been fantastic for me about that is that – as Zoe mentioned it – people who were involved in the very early days, when we said we want to get this going again, you know, really seriously.... everybody, pretty well everybody was like: yay, we want to do this! We want to do this again.

And then part of that is obviously beginning to expand those networks. So, for example in the Manchester situation our aim is to enable artists who haven't worked with us before to try it out to see whether they want to work this way.

And then we've had a core group, well it's been an expanding core group of educators and practitioners, who really are interested. They come to us and they're really interested in doing this. They are really interested in co-design. And that core group expands. We often have events where we invite other people in. We've got students, who've been involved in earlier projects, who then come and help on other projects. There's somebody who runs first year now at the University of Brighton, who've just worked with Rachel Gadsen, who's one of the artists from DisOrdinary – she does many other things as well. And that's somebody who was a student on one of those first projects we did, which was called sense of place, which was about students learning to talk about buildings in a way where they were describing them to blind and visually impaired people. So, they were really observing properly and at the same time they were learning a lot about what it is that blind and visually impaired people already know. So, having had that experience, she's now in this different position and she's immediately saying: I want to do more of that! So, it's kind of that snowballing I think is good. We also were beginning to get more work internationally

Z: Definitely, yes.

J: Copenhagen. we've been doing some stuff with the British Council in Italy and in Armenia. So, we're beginning to look at other places for funding and other ways of organizing. And I think longer term... I've been traveling a lot this summer and met some really interesting disabled artists... so longer-term the aim would be to work internationally also with artist based in those places to kind of extend that way as well. So, there's a lot of possibilities.

Z: Yes, and I mean the funding and all of that is quite hard work, because it's still that we have to fight quite hard to get change to happen. And you know, money doesn't just appear, does it. It's very much about trying to work with organizations like Art Council England to encourage them to fund the processes. Because there's a lot of learning going on, a lot of development for those

artists to go and work in professional practice really – I think that's the interesting bit, isn't it – and to develop their careers and develop their opportunities as well.

It's also working with the universities who are quite supportive, aren't they, with different trust funds and things connected to those that look at research and methodology. So, it's about all of those ways of doing things as well.

I mean, we have noticed that people who want to commission us to do projects... but often it's still so badly funded. So, we're just not prepared really to underpay disabled artists to work on those projects. And that's still there isn't it, that we really have to push to make sure that people are paid properly as professionals. It's not just about disabled artists, you know, sort of being available anytime to give their opinion for free.

J: ... which often happens to disabled people, doesn't it? It's assumed that you're not doing anything.

Z: ... so you can volunteer.

So, that that's really important to us. About how we keep the integrity of that at the core as well.

J: And I do. The Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London has been a fantastic several people there like Alan Penn, like Barbra Penner, Emily Stone have been incredibly supportive. And they have been funding... we both had research grants from them, and we've had this largish funding, you know, proper amount of funding for the architecture beyond sight project. So, that's been really good and I'm currently working with an architectural practice that are really interested in developing a kind of series of related activities. And where we're negotiating whether they'll fund that as part of their practice activities. So, those are the sorts of things, I think, we'd be looking for longer term. To move away from just having to apply to different sorts of grants and actually getting different sorts of sponsorship and more long-term embedded funds. We're on that cusp really.

(loud noise from a crockery wagon pushed by)

...turned out not to be so quiet! (laughing)

Z: it was quiet when we came (laughing).

L: Do you work with public funding mostly or do you also collaborate with private enterprises?

J: This architecture practice is I would say the first, you know, commercial funding. I don't know what the situation is with you, but here a lot of architectural practices just don't have, you know, their profit margins are pretty small. This particular practice is not in that situation, but there are various practices who were involved in the early days and they still have a real interest in what we do. But they don't really have any money and I find that when we get asked to do you know continuing professional development type work it's almost invariably a lunchtime lecture. That's it. And no money.

It's a hard market just because...and it's true. They're struggling at the moment in the current financial climate. They don't have any spare.

Z: But I think the fact that we've captured quite a lot now and we've tested different methodologies and we're developing the thinking quite seriously. And because other things are happening. So, I've seen something recently – we've been saying it for a long time – it'd be great, if London was the most accessible city in the world and tackle this and approach this in a fantastic way. And the government: I've seen a paper recently that they are looking at the UK being the most accessible tourist destination in the world. Those things will help, I think. Because we've got the theory, we've got the practical experience to help other people try and achieve those things. And it's, you know, 2025 isn't that far away really and an awful lot needs to happen.

O: But I think the role of this Paralympic in London, it had a huge impact here.

Z: It was massive! Worldwide! I think it had a platform worldwide. I mean the media for example in the UK went into shock and meltdown, because they didn't realize it was going to be so, well, that the public were going to be so interested in disabled people being part of everything. And that was quite interesting, because they weren't prepared. They suddenly had to find disabled people that could present, that could be on shows, that could be part of the infrastructure of the BBC. I mean, they've been doing it for a while, but they hadn't seriously done it. And they were taken a little bit by surprise. And I think the public began to enjoy some of the disability programming more than they did of the other programming. And that was a really good switch. But that had been an awful lot of work that happened before 2012 to change attitudes. And I think that's sometimes forgotten. And when we work in other countries we say: you know, this has been going on for an awful long time prior to 2012 and that just became a fantastic catalyst and pinnacle because you had that stage that worldwide platform to actually say: we need to think differently about this!

L: It's kind of ironic that it's the Olympics... they kind of rely on a norm, right? There was this case of this woman who had too much testosterone, so she can't run as a woman. Because she was too good. And this raised the whole question of how to deal with the Olympics and, like, categorizing people. And this whole thing of like using – what's it called?

J: ... Prosthetic leg

L: Yeah, and then runners can be faster even. So, it's considered techno doping.

J: One of the things that comes up a lot, as you probably know, around disability is that, if you're disabled – especially if you're visibly disabled – you can you can either be kind of a cyborg and kind of superhuman or you're like pitiful. And kind of worthless and yeah don't know anything about anything.

And those stereotypes are incredibly powerful. They're still, you know, they're in everyday talk. They are the way people talk. And you know that's my experience as somebody who's non-disabled working a lot with disabled artists and working into these spaces is how much those stereotypes hold just kind of people's normal way of talking. And one of the things we do is challenge that as often as possible. And again, it's this thing about starting from difference. So, to give an example one of the artists that we work with David Dixon he has a prosthetic leg and he does a project, which he's done two or three times now, called "Alterator" which is about the idea that rather than seeing him as either superhuman or, you know, sad case, that differences is just interesting for its own right. So, it's about that. And he gets people to alter their bodies in random ways. And then draw differently. I mean you draw differently because you've altered your body and look at the kind of creativity and enthusiasm that comes out of those pieces of work. And it's a really lovely project. And I think you should talk about your "Character scenario" too, I think that one works really well.

Z: It is about this everyday thing, you know, getting into the shops, catching the train, the bus, walking around the corner, going to the pub, you know, going out clubbing... doing all these things that everybody else does really. And it was through thinking about bodies in a different way and we started trying different techniques. And I just been developing training... it was working in Brazil really, for the Cultural Olympiad out there, but it was trying to get museum moderators really and people working in museums to think how disabled people coming into the museum environment might work in different ways. So, I've started to look at how they, as a training exercise really, about them being different characters. And those characters – not necessarily being disabled people – but being somebody who was carrying very heavy shopping, somebody walking through the building incredibly slowly, people moving very fast, people hopping, people sliding along the floor. And then it was about what was that experience like. And the one that seems to work really well is people moving through the building very slowly. So, people start to actually engage with the space a lot more. They begin to understand what's not working in that space. They begin to understand that you might be left out from the group, because you can't move as fast as everybody else. So, it just starts a whole new conversation.

J: But it also has some positives in it, too, I think. What's really lovely about those exercises is people say they really loved just doing things much more slowly.

Z: ... reflecting

J: So, everybody, through these different exercises, had this really interesting mixture

Z: It was a jump, wasn't it, from thinking how these things don't work to thinking: actually, rather than rushing through the space, I've begun to see that it, you know, that the textures or the smells or the... there are things that are really interesting here. Observing other people's quite interesting. Or there are places to sit down that may have not been designed into the building, but actually we could design more in quite interesting ways to make the building... better for everybody really.

So, that's been, yeah, it's been really great, hasn't it, to see that. So, we've developed those different characters more and more and I think we will continue, yeah.

J: ...in different ways and again, just to reassure you at that point. Because it's very easy for people to want to put disabled people in these different functional categories. It's like this is what you need if you use a wheelchair. Or this is what you need if you're blind. Or this is what you need if you're autistic. And by doing these kinds of activities, these kind of character scenarios, you're not performing any of those! You're not performing a category, but you're performing a set of, a way of being in the world, which connects to a whole range of impairments. And connects to the enjoyment of difference.

Z: It also seems to connect to the individual doesn't it. Because suddenly they say: Oh, I really begin to understand this now. And they seem to just approach this idea of the whole space in a very different way. And it becomes something they can connect to, not an abstract thing.

J: Yeah, because it is embodied. You do it in an embodied way, so you remember it in an embodied way, not an intellectual way.

Z: I was quite at the University of Westminster, probably about the third time I tried it, and with the students – and I did it slightly differently – and they quite went into shock after doing and coming back and reflecting. And it was really interesting to see such a huge change! From not having thought about this to – within 20 / 25 minutes – you could see, they could very quickly start thinking how they were going to design things in a different way. And I just thought this doesn't take a lot. I mean, it's taking a lot of time to develop it, but actually when you start have those conversations and you try things out, you can get people to stop doing this obsessive thing, can't you, about the myths or the characteristics of an impairment. And how that might, because of all the things you have been told... you can begin to just throw that out the window really. And start thinking very differently about it.

L: Thank you very much!

O: Yeah maybe one question we didn't ask was more about references or models or people that inspired you.

J: The person I'm most impressed with is Zoe Partington. Because what was really fantastic for me having been interested in thinking about how we might think about access and inclusion differently in architecture: it seems really hard! Like feminism, when you're talking about gender, you know, there are women around you can do that, there's women in practice. With disability, disabled people, although there are lots of disabled people in architectural practice and education, they're isolated, they often hide it, because it affects their possibility of work. Or their possibility of study. So, this notion, which came entirely to me from Zoe, from other work she's been doing, about working with disabled artists, without work we'd already been developing, just seemed like a really inventive way forward. It just seemed like such a rich way to go. Because you had these discussions. You have the equivalents of creativity. You were having discussions,

which were as much about art and architecture practices as they were about disability. You suddenly shifted the kind of where the discussion was had. So, for me that's vital!

Z: Yeah, I, think working in places like the joint mobility unit, which was a charitable organization that looked at accessibility and Peter Barker was in charge of that unit. He was a blind ... he come from a construction industry, so he had a very methodical way and did do guidance. I absolutely loved working with him. He did make me think about things in a very different way. But I was still quite frustrated with how things still didn't seem to shift enough. And then I met quite a lot of very radical disabled artists who definitely thought very differently about it all.

People like Barbara Lisicki, people like Alan Holdsworth, and people like Liz Crow. Seeing their practice and the way that they worked really made me sharpen up, I think. And address some of the mistakes I was definitely making! To really start to observe and look at what – it's quite fascinating-what doesn't work. And I think as a disabled artist your practice is about what doesn't work. And you can look at that and create things from it.

And I think it's that whole combination- isn't it – of being able to talk to people. I mean that's cause of Jos as well because I had a sort of history of architecture background, but I didn't necessarily understand the whole spatial issue of people moving through the spaces and how architects were taught I suppose. So, that was great as well cause that made me be able to think about my practice. Think, about artists practice and then think about how we might engage with architects and designers in very different ways. The way I was talking, it wasn't about moaning about space. It was about having a discussion and a discourse, wasn't it, about those spaces.

J: And having a creative way forward, too, I think. Not just saying: Doesn't work.

Z: Yeah. And realizing the strength in all part is really – when you've talked about collaborating – that that is how you get things to move really. I mean you know it's still hard work because people don't want to hear it often

O: ... You have to scream!

Z: Yeah. And you have to find techniques to things. You know I'll get to all sorts of things that are there supporting some disability initiative. And then you still look around and you think: There's no disabled people in here? Or they've got steps into the auditorium... they really haven't thought this through.

J: Once you start noticing that stuff you can't unnotice it. And that's the important thing is to start noticing it, you know, how many spaces you go into that are not even basically accessible.

Z: And I think Aimi Hamraie was fantastic, wasn't she? Cause she just naturally audio describes every image she puts up when she's doing a talk. So many people don't do that. They have no awareness, do they, that other people in the room might not be able to see what's on the screen. And I think little things like if modules for teachers or lectures, of all those things, were built into stuff. Then people wouldn't be excluded quite so much.

J: And just cause you were mentioning Aimi Hamraie. I think that one of the things that's been great is that we were able to bring her here from the states. And that there is, I mentioned disability studies several times, and I do think there's fantastic work going on in that subject area that doesn't penetrate into architecture. I mean stuff around gender and race and sexuality does... little bits of it, it depends where you study and what you're interested in, but there's literature on that within architecture as a discipline. You can read it. Around gender there's a whole history of that. Of stuff around race there's less of it that's very specifically about architecture. But disability studies which has been talking about architecture for years through people like Aimi Hamraie, or somebody like Liz Crow, who was writing about feminism and disability in the 1980s. You know has been around a very long time and very very knowledgeable and very creative in this area. There's texts out there.

There's stuff out there which I found because I do that kind of writing. I'm kind of... my role is to influence at the academic end. And Zoe's experience and knowledge is very much in terms of kind of direct expertise into practice and into kind of policy. But I have found people like Aimi Hamraie,

like Alison Kafer, who I mentioned, like Jay Dolmage, like Tanya Titchkosky. There's a whole gang of them. And the disability activists like the disability visibility project, who I've mentioned before and, you know, their whole campaign at the moment is called Access is Love. It's a really different way of thinking about access. It's about how everybody has a responsibility to make spaces more accessible and it's around care and collaboration. and it's beautiful!

So, there's stuff there which I think would be very energizing for architecture as a discipline. And I don't quite see why it seems so hard you know... Zoe was talking about how hard it is to actually change attitudes. But it's also incredibly hard to get those kinds of references just as part of the everyday life of architecture schools and practice. And they should be. They are fantastic!

(outro)

A: this was the F_PODCAST. And we're the fem_arc collective