FOR EXAMPLE:
RAMPS AND OTHER OBJECTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the lived experience of the disabled body and takes its relationship with the built environment as a starting point for investigating access. The research employs interdisciplinary strategies of repair and modification, mimicry and repetition, improvisation and speculative proposals, and utilizes critical design approaches to increase awareness, provoke dialogue and confront misconceptions about what constitutes accessibility. Incorporating sculpture, drawing and graphic design, the work in this thesis is concerned with exploring the intended function, use and uselessness of design art objects to highlight the unseen conditions of disability and design. This practice organizes itself around forms of failure: structural failure, failure of personal mobility devices and failure in disability culture and arts scholarship. Through material engagements, humour, absurdity and urgency as expressed in makeshift constructions, this thesis asks how the localized failure of artist-designed forms can draw attention to failures of access within larger systems.

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INTRODUCTION

A former professor once expressed his fondness for the opening line of the Rolling Stones song *Sympathy for the Devil*: "Please allow me to introduce myself." I remember him repeating the line several times, describing it as a beautiful way to begin introducing who you are and what you've done. He explained that the beauty of this opening lies in the request for permission: "*Please allow me* to introduce myself."

Years later, I find myself thinking about that moment, and repeating that opening line whenever I begin an introduction. As I carry this habit into this moment now, I've begun to wonder how it relates to permission, and how that relates to access—a major theme in the writing that follows. How does one introduce themselves, their work and the ideas that they've been occupied with for the past two years? This is something I've been grappling with as I've contemplated the content of this thesis. Perhaps the difficulty lies in the fact that during this graduate program, it has been my own personal lived experiences and failures with the body that have most informed my practice. It is one thing to make work that consists of such things, but another to disclose them in writing.

So, I thought it would be best to begin with how I created my first work during my time here: One day, the strap from the foot brace I wear broke. So, I fixed it.

This brace failure is something I've experienced many times in my life—a result of the daily pressures placed on this device through standing and walking. The repairing of the strap had been repeated many times before as a quick, temporary solution to counter, or remedy, the risk involved with the breakage. This repair involves wrapping the broken strap with duct tape, which, over approximately two weeks, cumulatively produces a casting of the strap (figures 1–4). I used to throw out this tape casting, and was in the process of throwing it out again when I noticed the repair and the object it created: a discarded duct tape cast of the mended strap. I became absorbed with the strange beauty of this accidental artifact, which depicted the repetitive process—the ritual—not only of the repairs to my brace strap, but also the daily use of the brace

itself. It represented my experience in an abstract and subtle way, which made it easier for me to share. From this work I began to examine other “failures” in my life, both physical and infrastructural, and the risk and repairs that were associated with them.

The work that followed used “failure,” “risk” and “repair” as concepts and strategies. These concepts and strategies are extensions of the brace strap work in that they also examine the body in relation to an object, and explore materiality, repetition and urgency. The works that followed included a series of cane tips made from charcoal and from wax crayon that mimic the functional rubber ones. These fabricated cane tips break under pressure, recreating moments in my life when my cane shaft has broken through its rubber tip, producing a moment of risk. I also worked with balloons, beading them in order to examine another specific material failure in my life, my allergy to latex. In addition, I designed a series of books titled “Accessibility,” which mimic the Whitechapel series *Documents of Contemporary Art*, in order to draw attention to the lack of representation in disability culture within art discourse. The books’ inside pages remain blank to highlight the lack of scholarship I see on the subject.

These works aim to answer the question: how can I share an understanding of my lived experiences through a playful use of objects and materials that present a physical risk to my life? These investigations, which also take on failure, contributed to the development of what has become a significant component of my thesis: the creation of access ramps using critical design practices to highlight the failures of access. In a series of objects that resemble access ramps, uselessness is apparent in the faulty design, absurd material choices and incomplete construction. And while these ramp objects do not function in the conventional sense, their intended failure speaks to the failure of ramps as a minimal solution to access.

In terms of the influences, conceptual backgrounds, and theoretical frameworks that have shaped this thesis, the framework of my research and practice derives from both design and art discourse, from articles and interviews, and from the work and words of artists and designers. This thesis begins by examining critical design as a

process, and explores its theories and practices, as well as its position at the intersection of art and design. I will also explore minimalist sculpture and principles by focusing on Eva Hesse—especially her use of repetition, her absurdity and her considerations of materiality and the body. In order to discuss how certain paths and objects present themselves to some and not others, I will turn towards Sara Ahmed, who offers a queer phenomenology as a way to reconsider the lived experience of specific bodies in space. Ahmed's concepts of orientation and orientation devices, as well as the failure of objects, will be central to examining the disabled body in this thesis. Further, concepts of value, function and use will be explored through the modified objects and improvised methods of designer Martino Gamper. Finally, the issue of disability, design and the limitations of embodying access "solely" in the use of ramps will be examined through the work and concepts of artist Park McArthur and disability activist Marta Russell. In the sections to follow, I will discuss my work as separate objects, and as well as a collection of things that speak with, and to, each other. I will also situate my work parallel to and interwoven with the works and words of the above-mentioned artists and writers.

The works in this thesis explore how both art and design objects can offer new ways of understanding the unseen experiences of failure. The discussed objects trouble the concepts of use and intended function in relation to the body and to larger systems of access. They are beautiful, playful and absurd. My intent here is to create objects that pose more questions than answers and generate dialogue using strategies of repair, modification, mimicry, repetition and improvisation to frame objectives and arguments in my studio practice.

PROCESS

> There is an art . . . or rather a knack to flying. The knack lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss. . . . One problem is that you have to miss the ground accidentally. It's no good deliberately intending to miss the ground because you won't.
> —Douglas Adams, *Life, the Universe, and Everything*

The outcome and methodologies of my work have both been varied. In my studio practice I utilize interdisciplinary procedures, critical design and practice-led methods to support experimentation and play. I employ an exploratory research method to gain understanding, while developing ideas through the knowledge of materials and procedures that also involve a little risk.

The term critical design was first used by Anthony Dunne in his book *Hertzian Tales* (1999) and describes a practice that uses design as critique. Critical design—one of my primary methodologies—can be conceptual, provocative and speculative. It refuses the role of design as primarily a problem-solving practice, and rejects the notion that its function is restricted to commercial purposes, solely for the production of objects for sale and for use. Instead, critical design uses design to "mobilize debate and inquiry into matters through the creative processes involved when designing objects."[1]

Authors Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby provide numerous examples of critical design in their writing, yet they provide no unique methodological direction for critical design as a practice itself. They characterize critical design as more of a position, and less of a methodology.[2] However, it is my interest in this thesis to argue that

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[1] Matt Malpass, *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practices* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1.

[2] Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 34.

critical design can in fact be a methodology. I would argue that perhaps Dunne and Raby's perspective is based on a design-forward attitude, rather than the attitude of an artist. Dunne and Raby are so concerned with critical design not being labelled as art[3] that they fail to notice that, at times, the designer's use of material investigations, iterative processes and failed experimentation follows an approach to making similar to that of artists. Dunne and Raby fail to realize that it is the absence of having a strictly defined methodology that provides critical design with its methodological strength; critical design can be adaptive, responsive and improvisational[4] when its outcomes are not determined before the fact.

While the terms *critical design* and *speculative design* are often used interchangeably, it is in my interest here to pull them apart. Since critical design "continuously interacts with other related practices, fields and disciplines, it uses any methodology that is accessible and appropriate at any given moment."[5] Critical design borrows tools, techniques and methods from art and design, literature and drama, and science and technology, absorbing these practices to become a system of methods that is based on other methods, such that "anything considered suitable at a given moment is legitimate."[6]

Having spent time in both art and design studios, I find there is often less importance placed on the practice and use of chance and failure in the discourse of design. The result of this exclusion, whether an effect of the design attitude itself or as a consequence of having clients, affects many of the works belonging to critical design that while different in aim seem to share a similar aesthetic form. They look much like the commercial products they are trying to avoid being. Some examples include a

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[3] Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 43.

[4] Improvisation is used to refer to an approach to making that uses whatever is available and/or created at a time when it is needed. Although I acquire a collection of materials in advance, the creation that occurs in the studio is spontaneous and without preparation.

[5] Ivica Mitrović, ed., "Introduction to Speculative Design Practice," in *Introduction to Speculative Design Practice: Eutropia, a Case Study* (Split: Department for Visual Communications Design, Arts Academy, University of Split, 2015), 17.

[6] Mitrović, "Introduction to Speculative Design Practice," 17.

fictional camera that has the potential to take pictures of alternative universes suggested by quantum physics,[7] and a camera that uses GPS coordinates and online searches of nearby geotagged photos to prevent pictures from being taken in locations where too many photos already exist.[8] However, there are instances of works that employ the critical design methodologies I am arguing for and that use a variety of methods from different fields. One good example of this, which further engages with experimentation and play and embraces failure and the absurd, is a work from designer Thomas Thwaites: *The Toaster Project* (2009).[9]

In *The Toaster Project* (figures 5–6), Thwaites attempts to build a toaster from scratch—extracting raw materials and processing them himself in an effort to replicate the mass-produced object. Working with the premise that the simplest toaster would be the simplest to reverse engineer, he begins the project by purchasing and dismantling the cheapest toaster he could find,[10] and finds that it is made up of about four hundred parts made from over a hundred different materials. Focusing on just five materials (iron, copper, mica, nickel and plastic), Thwaites spent nine months on the project, researching, interviewing geologists, visiting abandoned mines, sourcing and refining the raw materials required, including extracting iron from ore. In this extraction process there were several failed attempts at smelting with a makeshift furnace that Thwaites constructed himself from a garbage can, attaching a leaf-blower to act as the bellows.

Thwaites's experimental processes also produced the most unusual looking component of his toaster: its plastic case. Created by melting pieces of plastic and then placing the softened clump into a mould that Thwaites chiselled from a tree trunk, the case he produced resembles poured wax or something carved from butter. This strange and beautiful failure of a case demonstrates the potential "success" in accepting and including the failures of process as a finished object. More than any

[7] Anab Jain and John Arden, *The 5th Dimensional Camera* (2010).

[8] Philipp Schmitt, *Camera Restricta* (2015).

[9] Inspired by a quote Douglas Adams's 1992 novel *Mostly Harmless*: "Left to his own devices he couldn't build a toaster. He could just about make a sandwich, and that was it."

[10] Approximately £4. The project would end up costing 250 times the amount of the original toaster.

other example provided by Dunne and Raby, *The Toaster Project* uses critical design to produce an object that generates dialogue about the extractive industries, yet does not fall into the trap of creating something with a similar aesthetic to commercial products. Thwaites furthers this distinction by installing his toaster on the store shelves next to other mass-produced toasters. Thwaites is not concerned, as many critical designers are, with his object functioning—the culminating failure of the project was the moment when the toaster was plugged in: it only worked for approximately five seconds before the elements melted themselves.

The Toaster Project highlights what is involved with extracting and processing raw materials, the complexity of making a simple everyday product and "the absurdity of what has to be done to lightly burn a piece of bread."[11] However, more than that, the project highlights the use of methods from different fields, play and experimentation, and a practice-led approach. It demonstrates what is available to designers when they embrace failure and absurdity that may arise with critical design approaches.

Through experiments with material and with applying a variety of methods to create an object, new knowledge is produced through the process of making. My iterative process in the studio leads to new discoveries and a better understanding of how things can be done "correctly" and "incorrectly"—the latter often proving to be more useful in my practice. Concepts of failure[12] have been a significant part of my work, and failure can only really occur when it is unintentional. Even when I have attempted to create a "failure," it has been the error in that attempt which has produced more satisfactory results. For example, my failed experiments in the studio with latex and balloons have produced more interesting results than those that worked out as intended. By setting up operations of chance and fostering the accidental through

[11] Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 82.

[12] Failure in this thesis is used to examine the condition of not meeting a desirable or intended function—when the task at hand can no longer be carried. My works are designed to fail or reference a failure in some way.

repetitive[13] procedures, I was able to create a series of objects that I would have never known could exist without the experimentations. Trial and error produces successful trial and error.

In Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts, Graeme Sullivan presents an argument that the thinking, creativity and cultural investigations that occur in the artist's studio are a valid form of research. Sullivan positions the artist as a researcher who, through studio practice and making, provides insight to the world with their creation. Through these concepts I have tried to apply a self-reflexive, practice-led approach to making. A reflexive practice is a kind of research activity that uses different methods to operate against, or contradict, current ideas and practices and aims to provide new ways of seeing phenomena.[14] As a reflexive practitioner, my work examines the issues revealed within a particular situation: as Sullivan writes, "issues-driven inquiry of this kind not only identifies problems but also opens up areas whereby participants become responsive to potential change."[15]

Discoveries, however, do not occur only in the studio. My movements around the city, specifically on the route between my home and the school,[16] have been an important part of my investigation into access and the structures that provide and deny it. This research has included documentation, measuring, note-taking, counting, and—most significant to my practice—walking. This is where I truly notice my position in a world not quite designed for me, and where I investigate alternative paths to the ones provided.

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[13] Repetition, the action of doing or saying something again, is used in this thesis as a production method to generate dissimilar and unexpected outcomes, as a process of acquiring knowledge and as an aesthetic device and organizational principle to provide emphasis to an idea. Repetition further serves as a theoretical approach to examine how it orients the body in certain ways, and how repetitive acts, and rituals of use, are associated with the body and mobility devices.

[14] Graeme Sullivan, "Art Practice as Research," in *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual* Arts (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2010), 110.

[15] Graeme Sullivan, "Art Practice as Research," 110.

[16] Walnut Avenue to Queen Street West to Duncan Street to 205 Richmond Street West.

Sara Ahmed notes that in landscape architecture the term “desire lines” is used to describe the paths—the everyday marks and traces left on the ground—created by people taking alternative routes to the ones they are supposed to follow.[17] Walking and investigating desire lines influences my research as I examine how they may lead to failed or successful actions.

[17] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 19.

DESIGN

> In art, failure can also be a component of speculative experiments, which arrives at something unrecognizable as art.
> — Lisa Le Feuvre, “Strive to Fail”

Design, whether “mainstream,” traditional,” “conventional” or “regular,” is commonly seen as being related to commercial processes of developing, manufacturing and producing for mass consumption. Critical design is situated outside of these conditions, and is opposed to the systems of capital. However, it is not opposed to mainstream design. It utilizes similar “methods and processes as mainstream design to achieve different ends: discourse rather than technological or fiscal gain.[18] Rather than being concerned with the mechanisms of the market, critical design is often produced for exhibit. It is produced for an art-adjacent context.

Critical Design

A notable exhibition focused on critical design practices as such is *Strangely Familiar: Design and Everyday Life* (2003), at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The exhibition explored the contradictions of design in daily life, with projects that subverted the expectations of ordinariness and the anonymity of objects and spaces by blurring the boundaries between function and form.[19] On the other hand, *Wouldn’t It Be Nice . . . Wishful Thinking in Art and Design* (2008), at Somerset House in London, is an exhibition exploring the common ground and intersections between design and art, and features the work of Dunne & Raby, Dexter Sinister and Martino Gamper.

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[18] Matt Malpass, *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practices* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 8.

[19] Andrew Blauvelt, *Strangely Familiar: Design and Everyday Life* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 36.

In *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practice*, Matt Malpass provides a description of critical design as an umbrella term[20] for any type of practice that suggests design offers possibilities beyond problem solving.[21] He, like many others, also acknowledges that critical design practice is not new and has roots in the Italian "radical design" movement of the 1960s, which was highly critical of prevailing social values and design ideologies.[22] Critical design's close relatives include activism, conceptual design, design fiction, discursive design, radical design, satire and, of course, speculative design—the subcategory that has dominated the field in recent years.[23]

While I use techniques of creating things through theoretical design applications, I look to critical, and at times, speculative design propositions to provide support. Speculative design speculates about what design might be in the future. It proposes alternatives which critical design does not necessarily have to be accountable to in the same way. My works are not designed as practical solutions to accessibility "pain points,"[24] and as such they do not always propose speculative solutions. Instead, my intent is to make forms which act as provocations—works that express my frustrations with the limits of accessibility.

Critical design itself is not to be treated uncritically. Although I apply its practice and theories to my work, I am critical of some of the methods that are associated with it, especially when speculative approaches come into play. A common theme explored in speculative design involves imagining dystopian futures. Speculative strategies are

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[20] In this thesis I also recognize critical design as an umbrella term, similar to Malpass. However, Malpass's critical design focuses on product and industrial design, which he uses interchangeably, and fails to include print design, whereas I have included it. A book can be designed beyond commercial purposes, and used to create debate and dialogue, as will be demonstrated later in this thesis.

[21] Malpass, *Critical Design in Context*, 5.

[22] Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, "Critical Design FAQ," 2007, http://dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/13/0.

[23] Dunne and Raby, "Critical Design FAQ."

[24] A "pain point" is persistent or recurring problem, annoyance, or distress with a product or service.

then used to envision work that could be used in these scenarios. But for whom is this speculative future better? Such envisioning of utopian worlds and the objects that exist within them tends to exclude certain people—sometimes even the people the designers are attempting to assist—and often fails to acknowledge systemic privileges. This tendency is something I've been trying to be cautious and respectful of as I occasionally draw from the vocabulary of speculative design. This has made me examine my own privilege regarding accessibility. Although there are spaces that are quite difficult for me to move around in, I can often still enter a place.

Speculative design is not only a methodology, it is also a genre of design—one with its own aesthetic associations, which I usually don't care for. The objects often share their aesthetic form with the work of other speculative designers and commercial products—sleek, all white and resembling some kind of hybrid of an Apple product with a movable arm or with wheels that can be remote-controlled. When I imagine a designer using speculative design methods attempting to create access ramps, I envision a ramp's surface like a conveyor belt moving individuals upward; small lifting devices, elevator-like, that would take you up or down a step; a boost of air that would lift an individual or wheelchair up. As long as it is scientifically possible, it can used in speculative design.

However, I'm not interested in such speculative creations—in using science and technology to develop hovering lifts. I'm interested in art objects that resemble ramps at times, that sit between art and design and that offer criticism. So why, then, am I looking at speculative design? For all my skepticism and critique, there is still something in its theories that I find useful in thinking about how I position my work within the field of design, and give critical form to my daily frustrations with accessibility. In *Speculative Everything*, Dunne and Raby discuss critical designs as "testimonials to what could be, while at the same time, offering alternatives that highlight weaknesses within existing normality."[25]

[25] Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 35.

It is that critique that I'm most interested in when it comes to accessibility and ramps: creating structures that highlight a weakness within existing designs. For that reason, I position critical and speculative design as approaches that inform my work, since they can address and critique design's systemic flaws; any speculation about a better future, or better ramp, is secondary. Dunne and Raby state that "design as critique can do many things—pose questions, encourage thought, expose assumptions, provoke action, spark debate, raise awareness, offer new perspectives, and inspire."[26] The series of ramps and fake Whitechapel books I've created are intended to pose questions about the access that exists, and the access that doesn't. They do not attempt to solve issues around accessibility, but rather intend to speak to the failure of achieving effective accessibility, and aim also to create a discursive space, and platform, to critique issues of access.

Design Art

A common question with critical design practice is whether it is art. There are many critical design writers who attempt to provide answers, and most of them try to separate critical design from art. Dunne and Raby give credit to fine art, as well as literature, as being the most promising sources of inspiration because they can push the notion of fiction the furthest,[27] which helps when trying to imagine an alternative world and using an alternative object. Although their praise for art is high, they clearly state in their manifesto "Critical Design FAQ" that critical design is not art.[28]

A standard distinction between design and art is that design is about creating things that serve a purpose—it's about being useful. The unfortunate expression "art creates problems and design solves them" contributes to the singular viewpoint. But what happens when design creates "problems"? As design practice looks toward conceptual art for theoretical, methodological, and aesthetic approaches, the work produced can be situated in a realm between design and art, and labelled with the

[26] Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 43.

[27] Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 71.

[28] Dunne and Raby, "Critical Design FAQ."

term “design art.” Design art could be loosely defined as any “artwork that attempts to play with the place, function, and style of art by commingling it with architecture, furniture, and graphic design.”[29]

Whitechapel's Documents of Contemporary Art volume *Design and Art* investigates this interface between art and design. Through the writings of critics and practitioners from both fields, this volume follows the “phenomenon” of design art. Several of the book’s texts discuss function and usefulness as a way of determining positions of art and design, and what may constitute design art.

Joe Scanlan writes about the disappointment with design art when its “inherent uselessness is not made apparent in either its construction or in its display.”[30] Rather than producing a theoretical or conceptual uselessness—which might generate alternative modes of practice and thought—the uselessness of design art that Scanlan describes is in its impracticality and expense. He provides the example of Andrea Zittel’s *A-Z Living Units* as a work that attempts to blur the boundaries of art and design, but fails as a result of being so “materially cumbersome and ergonomically cruel as to be laughable as anything other than art.”[31] For Scanlan, the inadequate usability of these living units—determined by forces other than intentionality—shifts them towards art and not design. Richard Artschwager’s *Table with Pink Tablecloth*, in comparison, is an example of an object where the uselessness is constructed—it is about the appearance of being furniture without the function of being furniture.[32]

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[29] Joe Scanlan, “Please, Eat the Daises,” in *Design and Art*, ed. Alex Coles (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 61. Originally published in *Art Issues* (Los Angeles January/February, 2001), 26–9.

[30] Scanlan, “Please, Eat the Daises,” 65.

[31] Scanlan, “Please, Eat the Daises,” 63.

[32] Scanlan, “Please, Eat the Daises,” 64.

The one-off and limited-edition pieces produced by designers for exhibitions and museums also contribute their designation as design art. Art and design become closely connected within this context, especially with "installation having become the dominant exhibition format."[33] From this perspective, where critical design objects enter the gallery and are potentially made available for purchase in a similar fashion to what we expect from art, "critical design becomes subject to art discourse."[34] Although there may be distinctions between art and design, and critical design may not accept the label of "art," through challenging notions of function and use, and in its consumption by the gallery, it seems to find moments of existing within the sphere of design art.

[33] Burkhard Meltzer, "Design as Self-Criticism of Art," in *It's Not a Garden Table: Art and Design in the Expanded Field*, artist's website, https://burkhardmeltzer.net/en/design-selbstkritik-der-kunst/

[34] Malpass, *Critical Design in Context*, 72.

BAD RAMPS

> Ever tried. Ever Failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
> —Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*

Describing walking as a "way of re-inhabiting the spaces we occupy, and finding new ways of relating to those with whom we share it," the Spring 2014 issue of *C Magazine* looked at artists who use walking as their medium.[35] But what does walking look like when your paths are limited, and the obstructions in the city determine your movements? Because of my disability and my frustrations with how things are designed and not designed, I am interested in those wedge-shaped structures that assist an individual in accessing a space. I notice their presence and their absence on the streets I walk. It is in this way that my series of ramp iterations began—with frustration—and with the intention to highlight the absence of access ramps in my neighborhood and on my route between home and school.

It's funny and interesting to think about how a flat surface propped up at an angle—with one end higher than the other—is connected on the one hand to access but on the other, more significantly, to broader and less determinate structures of power. A simple inclined plane has the ability to influence the behavior of people. It's this structure's ability to provide access, and relation to power, that is the major focus of my thesis. I utilize critical design as a method to stage propositions to critique and generate dialogue about access.

My concern has never been to offer solutions to building better access. In fact, the ramp objects I create are quite the opposite. They are sometimes incomplete and absurd structures that resemble ramps, but lack their function. Their somewhat makeshift provisional construction thus speaks of urgency, calling attention to a need by the very absence of a viable function. From the first ramp I created, constructed

[35] Amish Morrell, "Walking," *C Magazine* 121 ("Walking"; Spring 2014), 6.

from cardboard (figure 7), to the several iterations following (figures 8–13), there has been one consistency, which is that they must all in some way follow the same dimensions of 6" x 32" x 24". This measurement is based on the proportions of a ramp providing access to one my neighborhood storefronts,[36] and was randomly selected to be mimicked in the first ramp I created. Since then these dimensions have been applied to all the ramps I have produced. A random choice turned into a rule to provide unity and allow each ramp to be distinct based on material and method rather than size.

The ramps I produce consider a variety of materials and construction methods in order to create a failure of a ramp's intended function. The failures are often made visible, although there are ramps that need a little bit of inspecting to determine where the failure has been implemented. In *Tilt Ramp* (figures 14–15), for example, the top of the ramp consists of a 1"-thick plywood board, strong enough to support an individual, and able to function as a ramp if it were not for a strategically placed apparatus underneath. A dollar store bicycle rack props up the board, and is affixed in such a way that its curved segment acts as a pivot point causing the top-end of the board to go down, seesaw-like, when pressure is applied on the upper half of it. The inclined plane becomes a lever—one simple machine transformed into another.

An important ramp to mention is one not produced by me, but one I came across one evening walking in the city. Although it was found after the first ramp I created, this ramp and the photograph I took of it, provided much influence on the subsequent series of ramps that I created. This ramp was a trifold access ramp, able to fold down a quarter of its size, made from aircraft-quality aluminum, and featured a slip-resistant surface (similar to what is used on the GO Train's accessible car.) This industrially produced ramp was haphazardly propped up by an old block of wood resting on a concrete step (figure 16). The block of wood, which wasn't very thick, was barely holding the ramp up by its top end and made the entire structure seem quite precarious. I thought it was quite interesting to have this industrial ramp, which does

[36] The storefront ramp's exact dimensions were rounded up or down to provide an even number. The ramp can be found on Queen Street West, somewhere between Walnut Ave and Niagara Street. The exact location escapes me.

cost a bit, being held up in such a makeshift manner. However, this absurd, improvised configuration possessed a compelling sense of urgency. It was quickly assembled to provide access. I was interested in creating something similar with my ramps—a combination of materials, an element of value or something aesthetically pleasing, and at the same time was being supported in an absurd provisional manner. Below are a few examples of the ramps in the series that developed from this found access ramp.

Veneer Ramp

With this ramp, the top surface was created from wooden veneer strips (figure 17). The strips were cut and arranged to mimic hardwood flooring or a kitchen counter—something that would communicate that it may be strong enough to be stepped on when being viewed straight on. However, once viewed from the side, the top of the ramp is exposed as a thin sheet of cut-up veneer strips, revealing its failed function of providing support. Taking inspiration from the above-mentioned street ramp, the veneer sheet, after spending hours taping the strips together was placed on top of nearest thing I could find in the studio—two stacked white metal air duct vent covers. Once placed on top, the veneer sheet began to curve, adding to its failure as a working ramp.

Linoleum Ramp

This ramp (figures 18-19) was centred around using found linoleum as the ramp's top surface, the same linoleum used for the flooring in some of the rooms at OCAD.[37] The linoleum top is placed on top of a ramp structure made from several pieces of wood, and held together with nails and screws, and, like the other ramps, appears to have been made with some kind of urgency. The linoleum as a material was used to mimic

[37] Room 418 in 205 Richmond and Open Space Gallery (49 McCaul).

the flooring in the classrooms, and also reference a material that is intended to be stepped on. Once placed on the ramp's skeleton, the linoleum begins to sag in the centre, as there is no support in the middle of the structure, and once again the ramp visibly loses its function.

Kickdown Doorstop Ramp

A clear acrylic sheet covered in bubble wrap that is propped up by a wood board, and supported by kickdown doorstops (figure 20). Here I was concerned with creating a ramp where my labour was visible in the absurd method of constructing a support. The surface of this ramp, which is made of clear acrylic sheet, is covered in bubble wrap. The bubble wrapped acrylic sheet is elevated by a wood plank that is being held up by a pair of kickdown doorstops. However, the doorstops are purposely installed in such a way that they collapse the moment pressure is placed on the surface. A doorstop's purpose is to keep a door open and assist in providing access into space. A subtle attempt to connect the doorstops to the ramp is made by combining the materials and placing the failure in the doorstops. The bubble wrap, often used to protect an object, is applied for humorous reasons as much as aesthetic. It acknowledges the potential collapse of the ramp and offers it a protected fall.

Teal Angle

One of my ramp works, *Teal Angle* (figures 21–23) was created for potential public use as part of the group exhibition *Sorry No Teal*. My contribution here was a site-specific installation—a ramp made from cardboard, painted teal, placed on top of the stairs inside Open Space Gallery (49 McCaul), which were perfectly situated next to an existing ramp. By placing my ramp on the stairs, my intention was to block the stairs and force people to use the existing ramp next to them. The cardboard slab was used as a material to look provisional but also, depending on the viewpoint, to appear as a structure strong enough to support someone. This deception was something I wanted to experiment with—to create something that could potentially act as a ramp,

but would fail under the pressure of actually being used. With no instructions, and people unsure whether or not the teal ramp was intended to be used, the installation forced people to use the existing ramp, which often meant walking further. This interaction, and the activation of that space, was exactly what I was intending.

Ramps, although they are often easier for me to use than stairs, especially when carrying something, are often positioned in a way that takes you out of the direction you are going in, and they always take longer. Recreating those moments for others to experience was important, and also to create the opportunity for others to question what a ramp is or does, and why we need them in the first place. During the opening I had the pleasure of watching someone step on my teal ramp, cracking it as they walked down it (figure 23). Once realizing what they had done, they apologized and asked if it was an artwork, which was an interesting question on its own. This stomping would be repeated by other people several more times throughout the duration of the exhibition, with more cracks being added with each step.

Eva Hesse

It would be difficult to talk about these ramp objects without acknowledging the influence of minimalist sculpture. The simplicity of their geometric form, materiality, and repetition reference the principles of the minimalist aesthetic. And some of my ramps exemplify that aesthetic more than others. For example, *Bent Aluminum Ramp*, as the name suggests, consists entirely of a sheet of aluminum bent to provide the resemblance of a working ramp—its failure existing within the thin gauge of the material. Appearing to be commercially fabricated from an industrial material, the ramp focuses on the form rather than the artist's hand in a similar fashion to those structures associated with minimalism. There is also the *Judd Ramp* (*Untitled Object Fabricated and Rejected*),[38] comprising a variety of materials including four Donald Judd books, a direct nod to the era and to the artist himself (figures 24–25).

[38] Collaboration with Craig Rodmore. See "Some Kinds of Collaboration," in Rodmore, "Title TK" (master's thesis, OCAD University, 2020), 21–27, esp. 25–27.

The word “minimal” itself is important in relation to the ramps. Not just for their reference to the art movement of the 1960s, but as a way of thinking of ramps as a minimal solution to the problems concerning access.

Although the work of Judd, as well as Robert Morris and others creating minimalist structures/objects, have contributed to my research and process, Eva Hesse has been the most significant of the artists connected to the movement. I look to Hesse for her work and words concerning serial sculptures, materiality and the relationship to the body—most specifically her use of repetition, absurdity and latex.

Repetition and seriality, which was fundamental to minimalist art, was evident in Hesse’s work during the mid-1960s. Her work *Ingeminate* (1965), in which two sausage-like forms are attached to each other with a surgical hose, was the first example of doubling in Hesse’s work. *Ingeminate*, which means “doubled, redoubled” or “to emphasize by repetition,” is considered by Lucy Lippard to be Hesse’s first verbal indication of repetition.[39] A page from one of Hesse’s notebooks also reveals her exploration with the idea of “repeats” through a list of words that includes *addendum*, *accession*, *repetition*, *range*, *compart*, *compass*, and *iterate*. Accompanying these words are short notes by Hesse. For example, the word *iterate* is paraphrased with “to repeat, to do again.”[40] These words not only provided principles for Hesse, many of them were used as titles for her work. One word in particular was used for perhaps her most well-known serial sculptures: *repetition*.

In Repetition Nineteen III (1968; figure 26), Hesse produced nineteen translucent, hollow cylindrical forms, each approximately 20" tall, and each different. Avoiding the minimalist principle of repeating identical, hard-edged, manufactured units, Hesse deployed irregular, soft, handmade forms. One of the cylindrical “bucket-like” forms appears to be perfectly constructed, while others appear bent, sagging, almost like failures. However, it is exactly these “failures” that Hesse was interested in—the absurdity of their imperfection and of the idea of repeating them.

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[39] Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 52.

[40] Brigitte Kölle, “‘Can It Be Different Each Time?’: Forms of Repetition in the Work of Eva Hesse,” in *Eva Hesse: One More than One* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 23.

For Hesse, perfection was an actual failure. In a previous version of *Repetition*, the fabricators assisting her completed a series of exactly cylindrical forms which she considered a "horrible failure." Hesse was "appalled by its perfection" and rejected the pieces. In an interview with Cindy Nemser, Hesse provides an explanation to why she repeated forms again and again:

> Because it exaggerates. If something is meaningful, maybe it's more meaningful said ten times. It's not just an aesthetic choice. If something is absurd, it's much more exaggerated, more absurd if it's repeated . . . repetition does enlarge or increase or exaggerate an idea or purpose in a statement.[41]

Hesse's response demonstrates an understanding that beyond a formal-aesthetic decision, there is potential to provide emphasis to an idea through the use of repetition. Repetition can give a message "weight and at the same to do justice to the absurd using means of art, indeed to intensify it in and through art."[42] The concept that repeating something, especially something absurd, can strengthen an idea has been an essential component in my work. Many ramps that fail to provide access are much more absurd than a single ramp that fails. Repetition not only emphasizes an idea, it also reinforces an intention.

Hesse saw the repetition of form within her work as inherently absurd. She has stated her great admiration for existential literature and the theatre of the absurd, such as the work of Samuel Becket. She describes the contradiction in *Waiting for Godot*—of having characters just waiting, saying they'll move on and doing nothing—important to understanding her own humour and artistic approach.[43] For Hesse, as well as myself, there is humour and absurdity associated with the tension between opposites and contradiction.

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[41] Eva Hesse, "An Interview with Eva Hesse," interview by Cindy Nemser, *Artforum* 8, no. 9 (May 1970), 59–63.

[42] Kölle, "Can It Be Different Each Time?," 25.

[43] Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, 185.

The contradictory features of Hesse's work are visualized through her play of the natural and synthetic, intentional and accidental, organic and geometric. This is evident in her works combining the soft, skin-like appearance of latex with metal wire or metal mesh, or, as with *Sans III* (1969), latex with metal grommets. A similar contradiction exists in my ramps with the tension between opposites and their hybridity, in order to isolate a failure through absurdity. *Styrofoam Ramp* (figures 27–28), for example, uses Styrofoam as the ramp's surface, which is lifted by a wooden structure that resembles wall framing. The wooden support is constructed to uphold the weight of someone walking on it, however the Styrofoam would clearly crack with the first step.

FAILURE

Failure is used in different ways in my work. First, as in the ramps, failure is used as a tool, built into the ramps to create absurd objects that remove their supposed function of providing access. That failure is created in response to what I see as the failure of access around me: the failure of not having enough ramps, the failure of ramps being seen as “the” symbol of access, the failure of a space once the ramp is used to provide access and the space inside has internal access barriers. There are also the personal and unseen failures that belong to my mobility devices. The breaking-down, wearing away, and eventual failure of their function through repetitive use. And finally, there is the failure I see in the lack of discourse surrounding disability arts.

Balloons

Hesse’s use of repetition, absurdity and materiality has also been influential in another series of works. As a result of my many surgeries and repeated exposure to latex gloves, I have developed a latex allergy, which I identify as a material failure in my life. This failure lead to experiments where I examined the material, creating works in which I purposely and carefully used latex in some way. One was a series of balloons, each a different colour, with their mouthpieces sewn with seed beads (figure 29). Working with the balloons was a subtle way for me to talk about the allergy, and also attempt to desensitize myself to the material.

Beading the mouthpiece was intended to highlight the area of the balloon which would be most risky for me to interact with. It would also create a precious object, through a laborious process, from an object that is cheap and potentially dangerous to me and others with the allergy. I’ve always found the potential of an allergic reaction from balloons to be ironic and humorous since they are associated with fun and play and wouldn’t normally be regarded as harmful. There is also the harm placed onto the balloons themselves as the sewing needle pierces through their

latex skin. The repetitive process of beading damages the balloon, each puncture weakening its integrity and producing a failure of its intended use.

I continued examining this material failure of latex by once again using balloons, and instead of using beads, I focused on latex as a material itself. Liquid latex was used with a variety of casting methods that included creating moulds and pouring latex on top of balloons (figures 30–31). These balloon casts test the potential of producing balloons that are more allergenic and thus, more of a risk to me. These latex experiments are similar to those of Hesse's described by Lucy Lippard. She had a long process of applying coats of latex with a brush, and waiting 30 to 60 minutes between coats.[44] The synchronicity is also apparent in experiments with a variety of latex applications, different pours and ratios of latex as a way to examine the properties of the material. There is an absurd "useless labour" involved with creating iterations of latex balloons since one could simply buy balloons instead of spending hours to make one that doesn't work. The balloons, similar to the ramps, are amusing in their illogical method: they don't quite work.

In addition to the procedural similarities in Hesse's and my work, there is a connection with the material properties of latex. Both our works utilize the colour and texture of latex, which has a suggestive relationship to the body and skin, to further relate to the health concern in our lives. An absurdity also exists in knowing that latex is not a permanent substance, something Hesse was aware of. Several of her pieces, *Sans I*, *Sans II* and *Stratum*, have disintegrated, and "other latex pieces have or will have dried-up, cracked, and collapsed."[45] Even when confronted with her imminent death, Hesse continued to create with latex. There was no compulsion to leave behind something concrete; she continued to work with a material known to be impermanent.

I too have noticed the latex balloons I created have slightly changed colour in the ten months since their completion. I exposed myself to a material known to cause me

[44] Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, 115.

[45] Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, 115.

harm[46] to create iteration of balloons that are incomplete and do not function as balloons are intended to. And with time, like Hesse's work these fragile latex objects will fail. They will deteriorate and fall apart.

Brace Strap

My first work examining a physical failure was that of the improvised repair to my brace strap. The brace, or Ankle Foot Orthosis (AFO), that I wear is designed to provide stability and support when standing and walking. These devices are custom fabricated with molded plastic that enclose the back of the calf and bottom of the foot, and leather Velcro calf straps that secure the brace. Although a solid structure, the continuous physical force applied to the strap from standing and walking begins the process of wear and tear. This friction is concentrated in the plastic component that the Velcro strap loops through. Eventually, with enough time, the pressure forces the plastic to break and the strap fails to provide support.

I can never tell when the strap will fail. Sometimes it takes one year, and sometimes several more, but eventually, and suddenly, the piece of plastic that secures the metal strap loop will break. This malfunction makes it very difficult to walk, and leaves me in a vulnerable position that requires an immediate solution—wrapping the brace strap with duct tape. After wrapping tape several times around the strap area, this quick fix provides sufficient support for my mobility. However, this solution is only temporary, affording me time until the brace is professionally repaired. It is also a temporary solution in that it will only last for one day, until I take my brace off—a process that requires cutting off the tape strap. The following day I will repeat the process of wrapping my brace with tape, and then again, I will cut and remove it. This act of repair is repeated daily. Wrap, cut, release and repeat.[47]

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[46] Near the end of these latex experiments, I experienced an allergic reaction that caused my eyes to swell, with one of them nearly swollen shut. I have since taken a break from using latex.

[47] The process of repairing the broken strap is not unlike the initial fabricating stage of the brace itself, which begins by wrapping the foot and leg with plaster bandages several times to create a thin cast.

Although subtle, there is an urgency in the works that result from this repair action that responds directly to living with a disability. This urgency carries forward in several of my works that deal with failure, risk and repair.

After a couple of weeks of repeating this process of wrapping, cutting and releasing, I removed all the tape to start fresh. This removal wasn't based on anything specific, although the compressed tape was becoming a bit rigid and difficult to release at times. The accumulation of the layers of tape produced a cast about 1/16" thick, with details of the leather strap, metal loops and plastic clip imprinted into the sticky side of the tape (figures 1–4). Because booking an appointment to have my strap repaired required a long wait time (more than two weeks to see the technician) and I couldn't make an appointment on a day that fit with my school schedule, I ended up creating months of the duct tape casts.

Wrapping my broken brace strap with duct tape began out of necessity. It wasn't until the slow accumulation of tape had reached the point of being removed from the brace, and discarded, that it revealed itself as an interesting object of process—one that represents a recording of a performed action of repair. More than any other of my works, this repair, because of its closeness with the body, is connected to practices of care. The process of wrapping my brace strap is similar to changing a daily dressing, mending a wound with gauze or bandages. But what if we considered the daily changing of temporary ramps—taking them out in the morning and taking back in the evening—as a practice of care? Perhaps then, through "isolating objects that guide movement through daily life," we can not only analyze existing systems but "imagine new ways we can 'receive-give-need-want-care.'"[48]

Once formed, the cast must be cut for the foot to be released. In this way, my brace strap repairs are not only about my failure with the mobility device, but also reflect that initial making of the device.

[48] Ariel Goldberg, "The Plasticity of Care," *Art in America* (October 1, 2018). https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/the-plasticity-of-care-63563/.

Cane Tip

Continuing to examine failures in the mobility devices I use, I turned to the walking cane that I use most days to facilitate mobility. Fabricated through combinations of hand carving and machine sanding, I created replicas of my cane tip from large willow charcoal sticks (figures 32–35). The charcoal cane tips break under pressure recreating moments in my life when my cane shaft has broken through its real rubber tip. This failure, similar to my brace strap breaking, happens unexpectedly, and involves a moment of sudden risk as it leaves me unstable and without proper support.[49] I also used wax crayons to create cane tip replicas through several iterations of casting and mould making processes (figures 36–39). By combining and melting specific shades of crayon, I created colours that resemble medical and laboratory supplies, such as the rubber from vintage stethoscopes and hoses, and the plastic tops of blood collection tubes.

These delicate objects were placed on my cane and used as drawing tools to mark substrates placed on the floor and at times the floor itself. The drawings, or marks, created by the charcoal cane tip are instantaneously evident, like mini-burst of charcoal—the tips cracking after a single step. Unlike the charcoal, which breaks immediately, the wax crayon cane tips allow for repeated use. This action is, in a way, even more similar to my actual cane tip, in that I can walk continuously before the unknowing unexpected breakage occurs. The drawings created are subtle and their evidence is apparent after an accumulation of steps. Walking back and forth in short distances, in circles, and at times just standing still and tapping the cane tip, the drawings are intended to be random spontaneous acts similar to occurrences of the rubber cane tip breaking.

These mark-making gestures and the fragments left behind act as illustrative recordings of my movements and of cane tip failures. Re-enacting these precarious incidences is an attempt to control and visualize my experience with instability and

[49] In a similar fashion to the repairs of the brace strap after the unexpected failure, the cane tip breaks have also resulted in a process of repair. These ad hoc quick repairs have included tape, as well as gluing materials such as cork to temporarily patch the hole.

vulnerability that occurs when the cane tip breaks. They make the unseen traces of my cane steps visible.

Accessibility Book

As my research into accessibly and disability arts expanded, I began to notice a lack of written material on the subject. Considering this to be viewed as a large-scale failure—that of the institution of art discourse—my attempt at a repair resulted in a series of books designed to mimic the Whitechapel art volumes. The Whitechapel series *Documents of Contemporary Art* is an anthology dedicated to major themes and ideas in contemporary art. Edited by a scholar, artist, critic or curator, each volume in the Whitechapel series combines excerpts from interviews, artists' statements, curatorial writings and exhibition essays.

By creating a fake edition of the non-existent volume with the theme of "Accessibility" (figure 40), I hope to promote a conversation and position practices and theories dealing with access, accessibility and disability arts as having significance to contemporary visual culture. The cover of my book imitates the Whitechapel volumes by using the same typeface and following the same layout of text on an image of an artist's work—featuring the work from Park McArthur's *Ramps*. However, the inside of the book is empty, with only blank pages, to indicate the void in the representation in scholarship on such subjects.

Working with OCAD University's Library, and the cataloguing librarian, we will be creating an accession number for my Whitechapel volume. There will be a copy in the stacks, and as well as a second copy that remains in the "new" section of the library display, with a "new" sticker placed on the cover. In addition to the book receiving a call number and physical label, we will also be working on cataloguing it in their online database as part of their collection. The installation of the book with its "new" sticker label continues to position the book as being urgent and necessary. Using the vocabulary of the library, it is a book that is long "overdue" within the world of contemporary art and disability studies. It also speaks to the issue of institutional

access and pedagogy and questions the what and how of the library's collection and academic scholarship.

In *Speculative Everything*, the authors praise suspension of disbelief highly and much prefer it to deception, which they feel tricks the viewer rather than allowing them to willingly suspend their disbelief. However, I feel deception can play an important role in highlighting an issue, and by doing so, create a conversation or make a comment on what's missing. Contrary to Dunne and Raby's lack of esteem for this kind of deception, Marcus Boon makes the case that deception can represent a significant understanding—an underlying truth waiting to be recognized. In his book *In Praise of Copying*, Boon suggests that through imitation, through the deceptive act, through what he also refers to as "play," we learn.[50]

Deception is used in this way with my mimicked Whitechapel book as it is designed to intentionally trick a viewer to thinking that the book is from the actual series. The discovery when realizing that this is a fake, contentless volume about accessibility reveals the lack of representation on the subject. It's intended to provoke a conversation about the importance accessibility and disability arts have in contemporary art practices and questions about why a real volume has yet to be created, and what it might include. Boon says that copying and deception are connected to power, and that power rests with the ability to produce an action.[51] The realization of my works' deceptive qualities reveals a truth—a truth that exposes the failures I see in accessibility from missing ramps to missing critical art literature, and thus the missing discourse surrounding it.

Since, as Boon suggests, it is a role of the library to legitimize books, and because such structures control appearance,[52] installing the "Accessibility" book within the library system contributes to it reading as a genuine volume from the Whitechapel series. This legitimization also contributes to a potential disappointed and frustrated encounter by someone who may have spent time searching for such a book, only to

[50] Marcus Boon, *In Praise of Copying* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 127.

[51] Boon, *In Praise of Copying*, 122.

[52] Boon, *In Praise of Copying*, 134.

discover blank pages. This frustration may be multiplied if the visit to the library required long or difficult travel. The book aims to create dialogue, and though its production was partially a result of my own frustrations with lack of disability art scholarship, I am conflicted by causing someone so much trouble. The library staff is also concerned, and is suggesting a disclaimer on their online database as a solution. We are still negotiating.

As the "editor" for this particular fake Whitechapel volume I also created a reader, a collection of selected articles and texts that could potentially accompany my "Accessibility" book (figures 41–42). This reader identifies the artists and writers discovered through my research whose work deals with disability culture and access. Examples of artists included in this reader are Park McArthur, who has been written about and interviewed for her work that uses access ramps to highlight these structures as the bare minimum as far as what access looks like, and Shannon Finnegan, who uses humour to create work specifically intended for a disabled audience, such as the *Anti-Stairs Club Lounge*, which is currently addressing the inaccessibility of New York's *Vessel*, a public art structure comprised of 154 flights of stairs. The intention of the Whitechapel "Accessibility" book was to remain devoid of any information and function only as a speculative object. However, I felt inclined to produce the reader to demonstrate that the potential for a real Whitechapel volume exists and that it wasn't very difficult to assemble. The reader, unlike the blank book, proposes a solution and encourages action.

A SLANT

In what ways can failure and the lived experience of the disabled body be examined? Rather than draw from a classic phenomenological approach to investigate these inquiries, I turn to Sara Ahmed whose strategies of "queering phenomenology" expose spatially arranged social relations and disrupt them by not following the approved and normal path.

Phenomenology, derived from the word "phenomenon," meaning "thing appearing to view," is the study of the lived experience of being in the world from the first-person point of view. The principle structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object.[53] In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Ahmed incorporates texts from phenomenological thinkers such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger to investigate concepts of orientation. She examines what it means to be oriented, to have bodies turned toward objects, and to have bodies and worlds shaped by actions. By applying queer studies and developing examples of the "other," she offers alternatives to pre-established structures of orientation: "To queer phenomenology is to offer a different 'slant' to the concept of orientation itself."[54] Ahmed argues that we are oriented toward what is in front of us because of the predetermined lines of orientation. The lines that we follow impose what objects we can perceive, exclude some things from being available to us, and pre-establish our extension into space. The line eventually fades into the background as we move forward, and we only focus on the objects and space made available along the line, without recognizing this unnatural orientation. Ahmed describes the results of this orientation when applied to sexual orientation and race, and demonstrates how they both can be seen as being "out of line" in worlds where heterosexuality and whiteness prescribe what objects and spaces are made available.

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[53] David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2018 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology.
[54] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.

Although Ahmed does not discuss disability, I would make the argument that it could be included with her cases about sexualization and racialization, and, at times, it could also stand in for both when discussing bodies whose orientation is also affected by "straight lines." I'll attempt to demonstrate this proposition by providing examples of Ahmed's text that deal with sexual orientation and race, and then present disability in the same context to see whether or not it can be imagined to exist in the same statements, in the same worlds.

On the subject of sexual orientation, Ahmed explains that having a tendency toward a particular object and not others brings into existence "straight tendencies" that are

> a way of acting in the world that presumes the heterosexual couple as a social gift. Such tendencies enable action in the sense that they allow the straight body, and the heterosexual couple, to extend into space. The queer body becomes from this viewing point a "failed orientation": the queer body does not extend into such a space, that space extends the form of the heterosexual couple. The queer couple in straight spaces hence look as if they are "slanting" or are "oblique."[55]

Ahmed's description of a world that allows for straight bodies to have the prevailing disposition to move toward objects and spaces unveils the "disorientation" of the queer body. Now, could we use the same text and apply Ahmed's views to an outlook that considers disabled bodies in order to reveal similar disorientation in the world? That having a tendency toward a particular object and not others brings into existence "nondisabled tendencies" that are

> a way of acting in the world that presumes the nondisabled body as a social gift. Such tendencies enable action in the sense that they allow the nondisabled body to extend into space. The disabled body becomes from this viewing point a "failed orientation": the disabled body does not extend into such a space, that space extends the form of the nondisabled body. The

[55] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 91.

> disabled body in nondisabled body spaces hence look as if they are "slanting" or are "oblique."

When speaking about race, Ahmed explains that the white/racist world orientates bodies in particular directions, which affects how these bodies then take up space. "Colonialism makes the world 'white,' which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach."[56] Here, similarly to what was done with Ahmed's quote about sexual orientation, a disability centred viewpoint can be inserted in the above statement. We could say that ableism makes the world ready for certain kinds of bodies that puts certain objects within their reach. With all this I am not trying to suggest that disabled bodies share the same experience as those that are sexualized and racialized. Rather I am suggesting that they can be placed parallel to each other, that they share a proximity in a world that disorients certain bodies. And with that, in the same way that Ahmed uses a queer phenomenology to allow us to see how bodies and orientations toward the objects are affected by actions, we could perhaps imagine applying a "crip phenomenology."[57]

Throughout her book, Ahmed uses Husserl's phenomenological metaphor of the writing table to illustrate how we might understand the proximity between objects and bodies through action—just as Husserl used it as an object to orientate himself toward, and on which to write upon. The table is the object that the philosopher comes into contact with, and the use of it shows us the orientation of philosophy and demonstrates how the object and subject work together. However (as we've seen with certain bodies), this "working together" where the subject is orientated towards objects and the object extends itself to the subject does not always occur, the object

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[56] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology Orientations, Objects, Others*, 111.

[57] The informal terms "crip" and "cripping," are derived from the word "cripple," and are used as "affectionately ironic, and provocative identification among people with disabilities." Both "cripping" and "queering," as explanatory strategies, provide a slant on mainstream representation to expose "dominant assumptions and exclusionary effects." Victoria Anne Lewis, "Crip," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015), 46-48.

doesn't work. And though it may seem natural to presume that the object is at fault for the failure, Ahmed suggests otherwise. "The failure of objects to work could be a question of fit: it would be the failure of the subjects and objects to work together."[58]

Ahmed continues by returning to Husserl's writing table to provide an example of a failure that can attributed to both the object and subject: One may say that the table is too high for them, as well as they are too short for the table. Although I agree with Ahmed's example concerning a table's and individual's height, would this scenario look different if we were considering accessibility? If steps create a barrier that prevents a person from accessing a space, should we say that it is true that both object and subject are failing to work together?

Though this may be technically true, I want to turn away from this assessment to emphasize that in the case of access, the failure belongs to the object and not the subject. I understand the claim that neither are working together, however this is unlike a person and table not being at compatible heights with each other. "The failure of something to work is a matter of a *failed orientation*: a tool is used by a body for which it was not intended, or a body uses a tool that does not extend its capacity for action."[59] The failure belongs to the object, because it was not intended for all bodies.

[58] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 50.

[59] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 51.

USE

To examine the objects that I deal with on a daily basis, as well as the objects I create, I return to Sara Ahmed and her writings in *What's the Use?*. In this book, Ahmed explores the uses of "use" and is concerned with following the word around, "in and out" of its history. Her interest is not just its meaning, but how the word is exercised, like a muscle, in everyday life,[60] and she puts emphasis on use as activity.

Her discussion of the use of things includes examining breakage, objects that are "out of use" or that have become "unused" and "unusable." She discusses use as being distributed between persons and things, and investigates "who gets to use what" and "how does something become available to use?"[61] And once again, Ahmed provides new ways of thinking about objects by proposing a *queer use*—things used in ways other than their intended purpose or by people for whom they were not intended.

Ahmed provides the example of a knife cutting cardboard to illustrate a transformation that occurs when something is used, and how use can make something used. The cardboard is being cut, but it is not the only thing affected. The knife is affected too: through use, it becomes blunt. The knife could then be sharpened with a sharpener, and then that affects the sharpener, making it blunt. "In a relation of use, there is a kind of transfer."[62] This transfer is evident in the wear and tear of my brace strap and the rubber tip of my cane. Both are affected through use by my repeated actions of movement. Use, time and friction cause these objects become less capable of performing their intended function.

As with the knife and cardboard, when the duct tape and my brace strap come together in the act of repair each object is changed. Wrapping the strap with duct

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[60] Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2019), 5.

[61] Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 5.

[62] Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 22.

tape creates a new form. In this new context the tape's intended purpose is slightly altered since it is usually used for sealing, binding and attaching things together; here, however, it forms around the brace to be used as a makeshift strap. It is in "use" when I wear my brace, when it is assisting with my mobility. However, it becomes "used" once it is cut and no longer acts as a strap. This action of the tape being in use and then used is repeated until the accumulation of tape layers is removed and set aside to exist as an object. This object could be referred to as a "memorized action,"[63] where a shape is formed through a collection of repeated actions.

Ahmed proposes that perhaps use can be used as a biography, as a record of fragility of the life of something. My brace straps and my cane tip can then be seen as a record of not only their use, but of the fragility of their life. At the same time, they represent a record of my life using them. When I walk, my cane tip comes into contact with the surface it is forced against. Erosion occurs slowly. The remaining worn-away tip acts as evidence of this repeated action. The marks left behind can be seen not as just a physical erosion, but as evidence of a history of use: "use leaves traces in places."[64]

In addition to the charcoal and crayon cane tips' properties as drawing tools—illustrating moments when my rubber cane tip breaks—they also serve to help me to consider the residue that is left behind in the world when I use my cane. While the small traces of residual rubber left in the environment cannot be collected or seen, and are only evident through the reduction in size of the rubber cane tip, the potential to imagine this rubber debris is realized when I use the cane tips I created as drawing tools. The accumulation of marks, small bits and fragments from the charcoal and crayon cane tips illustrate the rubber debris in the world produced through my movements. These gestures of mark-making and repairing not only represent a vulnerability of use, they also represent the invisible—a history of use.

[63] Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 38.

[64] Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 41.

Ahmed gives the example of the “well-trodden path” to describe use involved with movement. Through coming and going the existence of the path is created because people have used it. This use involves contact and friction of feet walking on the surface. Through this use, the path slowly changes, it becomes smoother and easier to follow. “The more a path is used, the more a path is used.” A path, whether a physical line or a path in life, can become clearer the more it is travelled on, and this clarity is established by how well the path is maintained. Heterosexuality, for example, can be a path that is maintained through its frequency of use, and it functions as a support system. When the support system is not there, when a path is made harder to follow, alternative paths can be desired. However, deviation from a path is not as easy. Here Ahmed is returning to the idea of the “lines” that she used in *Queer Phenomenology*: some are intended for certain bodies.

Some objects are designed for a use, for an intended purpose, such as a cup. Its shape is designed for a particular use, that is for drinking. However, the shape of something does not necessarily correspond to its use. Most objects can be made usable in some way regardless of their intended function. Ahmed provides the example of a handsaw being used to cut a board, or as a straight edge to draw a line. I would suggest here that using an object in ways other than its intended purpose speaks not only to the functionality of objects, but also to an urgency. If an individual is without a ruler or cannot locate one, rather than search for one, the handsaw provides the straight edge necessary for the task at hand. It not only solves a problem, even though the object wasn’t intended for that purpose, it solves the problem at that moment. A wooden plank might not be intended to serve as an access ramp, but when the situation is urgent, it solves a problem.

Although disabled bodies are ignored in *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed brings them to attention in *What’s the Use?.* In the section entitled *Usable/Unusable*, Ahmed not only discusses how to use something, demonstrating how signage on a door can indicate whether to push or pull, but she also focuses on who can use something. She acknowledges the scholars in disability studies for advancing our insight into the uses of use by “exploring how the world has been designed for a body with assumed

capabilities."[65] Through examining how things are used, we can determine for whom those things were intended. When something does not fit or fits poorly, it can be referred to as a "misfit." Ahmed notes that in the literature of design, the failure of things to work, or "misfitting," can be understood as incentive to create a new thing. So then could we not claim that a series of ramps and books that do not behave as such, can also be considered misfits? Here I position my series of ramps that do not enable the function of access, and my Whitechapel "Accessibility" book with its blank pages, as misfits. They do not act in the way that their intended form would suggest. And, being misfits, they hold the potential to reveal a failure in something that is not functioning.

In the *Evolution of Useful Things*, Henry Petroski replaces the expression "form follows function" with "form follows failure."[66] He explains that the way something is made is subject to change in response to their failure to function properly, and that "inventiveness comes from the fact—or perception—that things are not functioning as well as they could be."[67] Ahmed suggests that when we are concerned with our daily responsibilities, and things are working as we expect them to, we sometimes stop noticing them. However, she also points out that things can be revealed through a certain use and that use can increase our awareness of things.[68] My ramps and empty books work by not working. They become more noticeable through their failure to function "properly." We notice things when they fail—when they don't fit, when they break. And a "break can be how you leak information out as well as how you expose the failure of a system"[69]

[65] Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 59.

[66] Henry Petroski, *The Evolution of Useful Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 22.

[67] Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 25.

[68] Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 21.

[69] Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 225.

OBJECTS

In *Queer Phenomenology* and *What's the use*, Sara Ahmed provides alternative approaches to how we consider objects and the use of objects. She provides the idea of queering objects and their uses. When "things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, they still reference the quality of things."[70] This departure from the "standard" produces "deviant objects" as well as "misfit objects." Ahmed is not alone in describing and modifying the way we perceive and experience objects. Others have examined the role of objects and objecthood to provide insights in how they may alter our own understanding of things. Understanding an object's potential to speak to a condition can reveal how it can be used or not used.

In *Evocative Objects*, Sherry Turkle brings together a collection of autobiographical essays that trace the power of objects and their connections to people and ideas. Turkle herself shares a story of searching for objects, looking to find a "trace" of her father. Ahmed also talks about the "traces" of an object, one that acts as evidence of something, someone, or action. When thinking of objects, Sherry Turkle suggests that we "generally consider them as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences."[71] She proposes a notion of the evocate object to change our relation to things—to consider objects as "companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought."[72]

The concept of objects to evoke actions has been employed during political activism and protests for years. The V&A's exhibition *Disobedient Objects* (2014), examines the power of these design and art objects from movements for political and social change. Some of the disobedient objects included in the show consists of finely woven banners, defaced currency, political video games, experimental activist-bicycles, and a variety of "how to guides" such as a makeshift tear-gas mask. The

[70] Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2019), 26.
[71] Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 5.
[72] Turkle, *Evocative Objects*, 5.

exhibition catalogue concludes with an entertaining and provocative roundtable discussion with the curator and academics, including Jack Halberstam, who raises some challenging questions about the role of disobedient objects exhibited in major art and design institutions:

> How do things live together in a public museum, in an exhibit, in a show? And how differently do they live together there than in the street, the house, the private gallery? Do objects on display here only represent a disobedience that was performed elsewhere, or can there be a disobedience that emerges from their juxtaposition?[73]

Halberstam offers some ideas, suggesting that the collection of objects can become a collective through their multiplicity and repetition—unified more by intent and shared sense of will and purpose, and less by aesthetic value and theme. "The objects make visible lines of connections and solidarity between struggles."[74] The disobedience of my ramps, for example, exists not only in the removal of their intended function, but also in their collectivity. As a unified collection they speak more to struggles with the larger systems of access than any single ramp could. This can be understood through their failure to function as a ramp, as well, as Halberstam suggests, in repetition of their shared intent. My work also expands into collected disobedient objects, not just through the repetition of ramps alone, but also in the connections made through their proximity to brace repairs, cane tips, and empty books that speak to disability and access.

[73] Jack, Halberstam, "Roundtable," in *Disobedient Objects*, ed. Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon (London: V & A Publishing, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2014), 132.

[74] Halberstam, "Roundtable," 133.

Martino Gamper

As I position my work next to the work and ideas of other artists I also look to London-based Martino Gamper, a designer working at the boundaries of art. One of the many themes that have developed and continue to appear in Gamper's work is the production of one-off assemblages—makeshift furniture-like objects created from discarded materials, deconstructed furniture components and salvaged parts. These explorations into functionality and materials led to his most acclaimed project, *100 Chairs in 100 Days* (2005–07). In this project, Gamper created one new chair each day for a hundred days by collaging together discarded chairs and chair fragments that he had collected from the garbage, streets and alleyways and friends' homes over a period of about two years.

Gamper's new "chairs" transform into hybrid objects that intersect furniture design and sculpture. They consist of contrasting materials and components, shapes, lines and colour, and size and weight—*Inflation* (2006), a brown wooden chair that has its missing back replaced with a blue transparent inflatable fastened together with rope, is a great example of this. His modifications combine chairs within chairs, bicycle seats and frames, a metal wire crate, a lamp—and even a walking cane makes an appearance, serving as a chair leg (figures 43–48).

Describing the process of making one hundred chairs, Gamper has explained that the motivation for the project was the methodology: "the process of making, of producing and absolutely not striving for the perfect one."[75] This method of production was less about the freedoms allowed through the multitude of imaginable and speculative chair arrangements, and much more about the restrictions. The restrictions were "key" for him, working with the limitations of the material and style of the found chairs, and within the time available—one day for every new chair creation. Each chair had to be unique, speak to a concept, and have a personality of its own.

[75] Martino Gamper, *100 Chairs in 100 Days*, artist's website, https://www.martinogamper.com/project/a-100-chairs-in-a-100-days/.

I find similarities between Gamper's methodology with my own work. In the series of ramps, I am also not attempting to create the perfect one, or even the perfect failed one. Rather the emphasis is on the process and iterations, allowing each ramp to have its own characteristics and its own references to design, art, fashion or construction. And, like Gamper, restrictions are central to my work. I implemented a rule in the production of the ramps, that they must all, in some way, follow the same dimensions. This restriction provides a challenge: it limits obvious variations of uniqueness, and promotes the process of spontaneity and improvisation. This process in the studio encourages making rather than hesitating, and encourages action. It also exemplifies the type of action that could be taken to remove a barrier. A wooden board or plank can easily act as a ramp—a spontaneous improvised action to solve a problem, to provide access.

An important objective of Gamper's project was to promote a new kind of design-thinking that provoked debate about value and functionality. Coming from an industrial design context, a plastic lawn chair is not considered to be of high value. However, by modifying a lawn chair, adding parts from a different chair that is considered to have value (such as an Eames chair), and through Gamper's designer touch (his skilled fabrication, as well as his reputation), he challenges concepts of value. And, unlike the conventional production of industrial design products, this hybrid chair only exists as a one-off. The once low-value practical and utilitarian chair designed for everyday use is transformed into a singular unique object, which, although it still holds the potential to function as a chair, may not be used as such due to its newly acquired value and rarity. This effect situates Gamper's hybrid creations within the discourse of design art and he uses this position to confront perceptions of value, use and function.

Use is further reconsidered as Gamper challenges the intended function of the components of a chair—the back of a chair becomes the seat, chair arms become chairs legs and legs become arms. In *Plank Rocker* (2006), a curved seat becomes the base for a rocking chair, and in *Giro* (2007) a found bicycle frame and seat are transformed into a fixed stool-like structure. A chair can be many things. The iterations of my ramps, from the most absurd failure to the simplest, aim to speak to

that notion of value, and demonstrate the possible iterations of functional ramps that could be deployed. From high-end commercially fabricated ramps to makeshift ramps, they all function in the same way to provide access. A ramp can be many things.

With my ramps, I also wanted to provoke debate about the value and functionality of ramps in relation to access. However, I am not considering value as related to monetary or material worth, even though there is a connection to access and capital. Rather my aim is to speak to the "value" of ramps as importance—as having significance to the lives of those people who need them. As having value to not just disabled bodies, but to those with temporary impairments, strollers or luggage. There is more value in having a ramp than not. There is more value in having access for all than not.

Although there are differences in the intent and performance of my work and Gamper's—his chairs, for the most part, actually function as chairs—there are similarities in the construction. By merging elements from disparate structures and styles, we both produce hybrids that are contradictory and humorous. However, for my ramps, this contradiction is not only evident in their materiality and construction, but also within the concept itself—access ramps that do not provide access. Taken together, the "100 chairs he made can be seen as a series of quotes from high and low design history, a chatter of design ideas interacting with one another";[76] I see my ramps as interacting with one another as well, speaking not only to design and art ideas through their construction and references, but also to assess the failures of access.

[76] Gareth Williams, "Martino Gamper," in *21 Twenty One: 21 Designers for Twenty-First Century Britain* (London: V & A Publishing, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2012), 167.

ACCESS

On a daily basis, my movement in the city is affected by the degree of accessibility of architectural structures or the extent to which access devices achieve their function. The work I create not only addresses issues of access as a broad topic, but examines my own interactions with spaces, including the devices I use to help facilitate mobility. Through documenting my movements and highlighting frustrations of failure in these systems, I use my lived experiences as case studies to address this issue of access, non-access and the failure of access. Access itself can be associated with more than one concern. There are many artists, organizers, activists and institutions, whose work is centred around access that deals with class position, gender identity, race and sexual orientation. However, it is the access that is connected with disability that is often perceived as "the" access. This may be a result of its graphic design visibility—signs and symbols that act as identifiers of ability, and of actions toward improvement.[77]

So, then what do I mean when I'm referring to access? The word itself is the subject of a short essay by Bess Williamson in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, where its meaning is explained as the power, opportunity, permission, or right to approach, communicate or contact someone or something.[78] It can also involve the right to receive something. In the "most literal form," Williamson describes access as the "ability to enter into, move about within, and operate the facilities of a site, and is

[77] Graphic design has also been examining itself in relation to access. Recommended accessibility design standards have been created to remove visual barriers. These suggestions include setting the main body of text to a minimum of 12-points, using a sans-serif for the body and using high colour contrast between text and background. For purposes of this paper I will attempt to follow the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) guidelines for Accessible Graphic Design. In compliance with their recommendations, I am using the typeface Suisse Int'l LD by Craig Rodmore. See Rodmore, "Title TK" (master's thesis, OCAD University, 2020), appendix B ("Long Dash: Suisse Int'l LD"), 72–82.

[78] Bess Williamson, "Access," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015), 14.

associated with architectural features and technologies."[79] However, Williamson notes that "figuratively" access can convey a wider range of meanings associated with social and political concerns.

My recent work considers the relation to a place or space, and the physical barriers that impede or prevent bodies from entering. I've divided access into three categories, which I refer to as access, non-access and the failure of access. I use "access" to discuss the access that I see present in the world, such as ramps, devices that assist an individual to enter a space. "Non-access" I see as no attempt to remove barriers (such as the lack of ramps) and "failure of access" as the minimal access granted that I see in using ramps, which may get someone inside a space, but then that space may not itself be accessible once they are in it.

This is where I have turned to Park McArthur for her words and influence as an artist working with the issues of accessibility. McArthur, who uses a wheelchair, creates work that examines her everyday living and uses her personal experience with healthcare, discrimination and ableism to inform her practice. Often what she creates and exhibits has developed out of necessity. There is a sense of urgency in her work that responds directly to experience of disability. This urgency is evident in McArthur's exhibition *Ramps* (figures 49–51), in which she displayed portable access ramps in a gallery to address issues of accessibility.

Ramps was the culmination of over three years of McArthur's self-advocacy (2010–14) in which she asked different art institutions to build access ramps so that she could enter their spaces, and then later requested the same institutions to loan the ramps for her 2014 exhibition at Essex Street in New York. McArthur's show consisted of this collection of ramps, twenty in all, arranged grid-like on the gallery floor. The dimensions of the ramps varied, as did their shapes, materials and condition, ranging from aluminum to plywood wedges to broken pieces of laminated chipboard. Each of the ramps were titled after the organizations they came from, which included: *Recess* (2012); *Essex Street* (2013); *Whitney*

[79] Williamson, "Access," 14.

Independent Study Program (2013). However, some ramps without a site designation, perhaps removed from institutions wanting to remain anonymous, were titled materially, such as *brown with tape* (2011), *metal* (2013) and *white with scratches* (2013).

The range of ramps, from their titling by location to those describing their materials and condition, speak to the institutions' urgent compliance with McArthur's requests, their economic resources, and the usage and temporality of the makeshift ramps. The juxtaposition of technically advanced ramps that extend and fold, constructed from rust-resistant aluminium such as *Apexart* (2010) next to a bent piece of plywood board (*warped*, 2011), highlight these issues. The ramps, mostly put into effect for McArthur's personal use, might also signal which institutions have a "vested interest in accessing—and being seen to access—a wider public audience. For a small non-profit institution or educational body, the demonstration of non-discriminatory exclusivity is crucial; for galleries and other boutique commercial ventures operating under less regulated conditions, different conventions might apply."[80]

In *Ramps*, McArthur also installed signs on the site of each lending institution she borrowed a ramp from that indicated that their ramp could be found at the Essex Street Gallery. Here McArthur is playing with a New York City Law (Number 2012/0472010) that does not demand a building to be accessible, rather it requires inaccessible building entrances, public toilets, and elevators to give directions, phone numbers, or other instruction as to the nearest available accessible entrance or facility. In addition to these off-site installations, an important work in *Ramps* is a vinyl URL of the Wikipedia page McArthur created for Marta Russell placed on the gallery wall (figure 51).

Russell was a disability rights activist and writer whose book *Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract* is not only the source of the title of McArthur's exhibition, but also represents the crux of what her show is really about: it

[80] Kari Rittenbach, "Park McArthur," *Frieze* 163 (May 2014), https://frieze.com/article/park-mcarthur.

emphasizes the fact that she does not want to support the thinking that ramps are the be-all and end-all of what access looks like.[81] In *Beyond Ramps*, Russell examines how disability and disability policy can be used as a tool for everyone to rate the current social and economic order. Her book begins with a "Russell Index," a series of useful and powerful facts that prepare us for the chapters ahead, and helps to visualize the issues of accessibility as being one that can impact a larger group than we may think. Examples of these include:

% of persons in the US who have an impairment: 20
% of the population who will experience a disabling condition in the course of their lives: 80

Over the course of three chapters, Russell investigates the nature and mechanics of oppression on disabled bodies, and the relationship between disability, social Darwinism, and economic austerity under capitalism. She reminds us that policies are social decisions that can result in the "de-valuation and even loss of human life," and the oppression from these decisions are not only "pervasive, but planned."[82] Even the subtitle of *Beyond Ramps*, "A Warning from an Uppity Crip," sets the tone for her book, and indicates her concern with the current approach to disability rights being simplified by the representation of a ramp. For Russell, ramps symbolize the minimal advancement to disability rights and access. Allowing for physical modifications to architecture is needed, but larger systemic modifications would benefit the social and economic condition of disabled bodies, as well as other marginalized bodies.

Russell concludes her book by discussing the importance of recognizing that identity-based movements can provide opportunities to expand our understating of "oppression and progression." They can transform culture, provide materials to highlight what the issues are, and what "difference" means. Identity movements can

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[81] Park McArthur, "Park McArthur Interviewed by Jennifer Burris," *Bomb Magazine*, February 19, 2014, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/park-mcarthur/.

[82] Marta Russell, *Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract: A Warning from an Uppity Crip* (Monroe, Me.: Common Courage Press, 1998), 9.

promote “social solidarity” and for that to happen we must build upon mutual respect and support without dismissing or diluting difference. . . . To move beyond ramps, we must first agree that ramps are indisputably necessary.”[83]

I return Halberstam’s consideration of solidarity in *Disobedient Objects*—the idea that a series of objects can become a collective, can become unified, through visible connections of struggle. More than the removal of McArthur’s ramps from their sites, which, similar to my ramps, creates a removal of an expected function, the disobedience of her ramps exists in their collectivity. As a unified collection they speak more to struggles with the larger systems of access than any single ramp could. This is important because, for McArthur, the exhibition is less about ramps than it is an exhibition of ramps that survey her interactions with the art institutions that either created or purchased the portable access ramps for outside their buildings. It’s about ramps as temporary solutions to the infrastructural failures of accessibility. It’s about not accepting systems and the “minimal relational proposition” of their structural access, which McArthur describes as mere accommodations.[84]

McArthur speaks about not wanting just these accommodations, but rather changing the systems and structures that see the presence of certain bodies as an act of accommodation. She asks us to flip the terms of accommodation, and instead say that we will no longer accommodate structural oppression: no longer accommodate racism, no longer accommodate sexism, no longer accommodate police brutality, no longer accommodate ableism.[85]

Here I use McArthur’s lessons to inform my practice when considering access that extends beyond ramps. Whether that “beyond” includes the physical space a ramp provides access to, or social spaces that may oppress disabled bodies. For both Russell and McArthur, ramps embody and signify the conflicted achievement of

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[83] Russell, *Beyond Ramps*, 233.

[84] Park McArthur, "Against Accommodation: Park McArthur," interview by Daniel S. Palmer, *Mousse 47* (February/March 2015), http://moussemagazine.it/park-mcarthur-daniel-s-palmer-2015/.

[85] McArthur, "Against Accommodation."

disability rights. They are necessary, yet so much is ignored when access is defined entirely in "terms of measurable architectural elements."[86] By creating structures that resemble ramps without employing their intended function of providing access, my work speaks their need, the lack of their presence, and to the concept of ramps as the solution that encompass all there is to access.

The significance of McArthur's ramps is not just that she removed them from their intended locations, but that she re-contextualized them through their placement in the gallery. In their new context, the ramps could be viewed as "broken," not functioning with their intended purpose. The works redefine design "beyond ramps." That is, "thinking not only in terms of functional access, but also in terms of concepts prized in the broader design world of beauty, style, and conceptual provocation."[87]

[86] Bess Williamson, *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 186.

[87] Williamson, *Accessible America*, 188.

BEYOND THESIS

In the essay *Disability*,[88] Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin reflect on a scene from *Monica and David*, a documentary about a married couple, both with Down's syndrome, discussing what disability means to them. Monica answers the question by suggesting it is someone in a wheelchair or people who cannot hear or walk. David's response, however, is that he does not have a disability, and when asked if he has Down's syndrome, he replies, "sometimes." As the writers discuss, the exchange between the married couple reminds us of the challenges of defining disability. It can be fluid and at times contradictory. And David's answer "sometimes" exemplifies a key concept for this thesis: "that disability is produced as much by environmental and social factors as it is by bodily conditions."[89]

The International Symbol of Access, consisting of blue background overlaid with a white figure in a wheelchair, illustrates a problem of representing disability and access merely in terms of mobility impairment and wheelchair access.[90] Considering this, it only makes sense that this type of classification has resulted in ramps becoming "the" symbol and solution to providing access. Removing barriers is clearly important, and ramps are "indisputably necessary," however they are not the be-all and end-all, as Marta Russell and Park McArthur have pointed out.

Jack Halberstam suggests embracing the "queer art of failure"—the "absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy"[91] as a method of engaging with the disappointments of life. I would suggest then that the absurdity of creating failing ramps is one particular artistic approach to engaging with the disappointments of access. It can be a way to confront the paths and objects designed for only certain bodies. It can also be a way to expose those disorientations: as Ahmed suggests, "to make things queer

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[88] Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, "Disability," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. Adams, Reiss, and Serlin (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015), 7.

[89] Adams, Reiss and Serlin, "Disability," 7.

[90] Bess Williamson, "Access," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, 17.

[91] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 187.

is certainly to disturb the order of things."[92] This is what my work aims to do. It organizes itself around forms of failure to disturb the order of things, to provide a "slant" on the conventional viewpoint through presenting the lived experience of the disabled body and the failures encountered with mobility devices, disability culture, and structural access. Critical design practice supports these efforts by positioning itself closer to everyday life since that is "where it's power to disturb lies."[93]

From the first ramp I created to the most recent iteration, there remains for me an interest in critiquing the absence of ramps and their failure as "the" solution for access. Ramps tend to work just fine if they are present, and the StopGap Foundation is a critical presence in the built terrain.[94] But even as the name suggests, a "stopgap" is just a temporary way of dealing with a problem—a makeshift solution. I'm not critiquing ramps themselves. I'm critiquing how the culture of ramps fails to attend to larger issues of accessibility. By taking the form of absurd, makeshift and incomplete artist-designed objects, my work poses questions about accessibility rather than providing answers, and draws attention to the failures of access within larger systems.

As artists and designers create, sometimes their contributions can be catalysts for some kind of "change," whether social or political. Yet, sometimes simply being present can be a contribution. I'm interested in being a participant: a participant through my work in the areas of art and design that aim to create debate and dialogue about access. I'm interested in joining the conversations of others, in having

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[92] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 161.

[93] Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 43.

[94] The StopGap Foundation is an organization that provides brightly painted deployable wooden access ramps to local businesses and private building owners with singe-step storefronts. Since the ramps are portable, there is no need for a permit such as would be required for a fixed ramp. As the organization states these ramps do not present a "perfect solution to the problem however they do get people talking about the much bigger issue of inclusivity and accessibility for all." stopgap.ca

my work sit next to the works and writings that play a significant role in highlighting the unseen issues and experiences connected to design and disability.

There has been a fortunate outcome from my series of ramp objects, which is that people have been noticing ramps. They have been noticing their presence or absence, as well as the variety of ramp structures they come across, from the permanent and temporary, to the industrial and handmade. More than anything else, they have been noticing the makeshift and unusual. As a result, I have engaged in conversations about the ramps people are encountering in public, and occasionally they have provided photographs of these provisional objects and their "use."

One of the more amusing photographs shows a slowly disintegrating StopGap ramp, worn down from the ritual of daily use (figure 52). As its bottom end breaks and splinters, revealing layers of lumber and wooden fragments spread on the sidewalk—this ramp provides evidence of a well-trodden path.[95] Another photograph and also a personal favourite is once again a StopGap ramp in action. However, this time, it is the particularly absurd "use" of the ramp that makes it humorous (figure 53). Rather than performing its intended function, this ramp is used to prop a door open, ironically creating a barrier greater than the one it was intended to remove.[96] After all, a wedge does make a great doorstop, and so, in one quick move, the urgency to provide a bit of fresh air to some overtakes the urgency to provide access to all.

[95] Thank you to Derek Sullivan for discovering this ramp and providing the image.

[96] Thank you to Craig Rodmore for discovering this ramp and providing the image.

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Figure 1

Brace Straps
2018
Duct tape
Approx. 4.25" x 4" diameter

Figure 2

Brace Straps
2018
Duct tape
Approx. 4.25" x 4" diameter

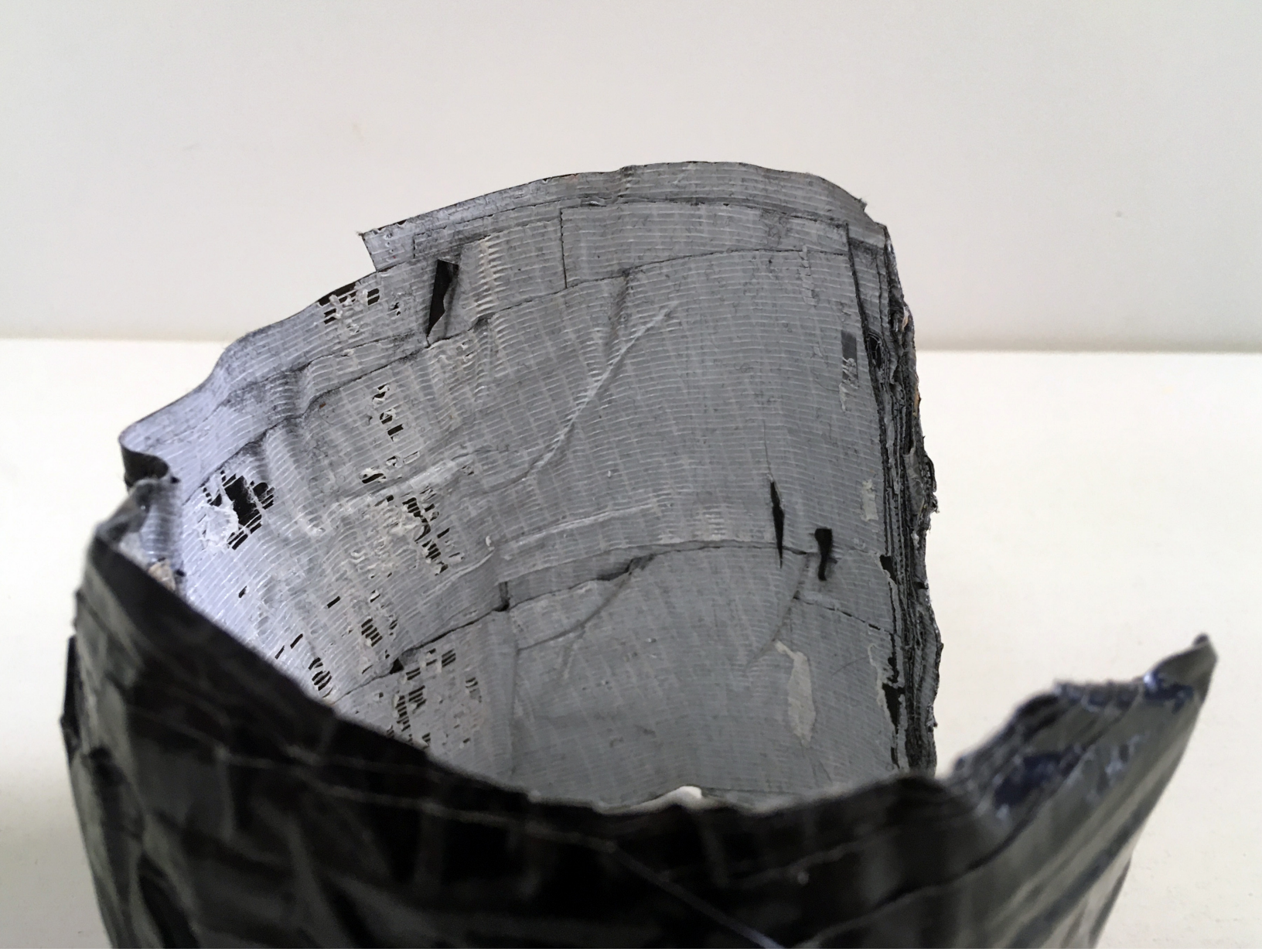

Figure 3

Brace Straps (detail)
2018
Duct tape
Approx. 4.25" x 4" diameter

Figure 4

Brace Straps
2018
Duct tape
Approx. 4.25" x 4" diameter

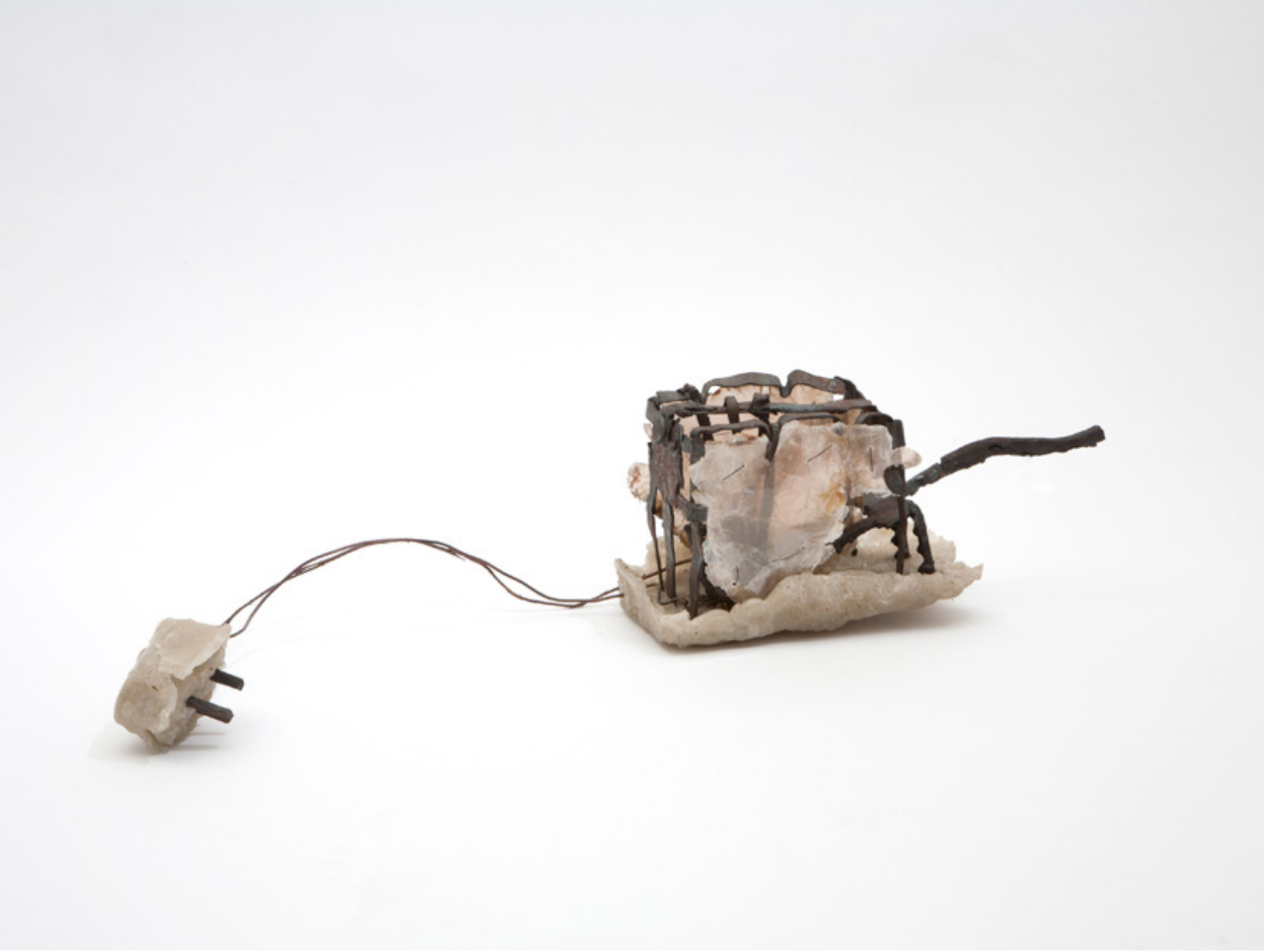

Figure 5

Thomas Thwaites
The Toaster Project
2009

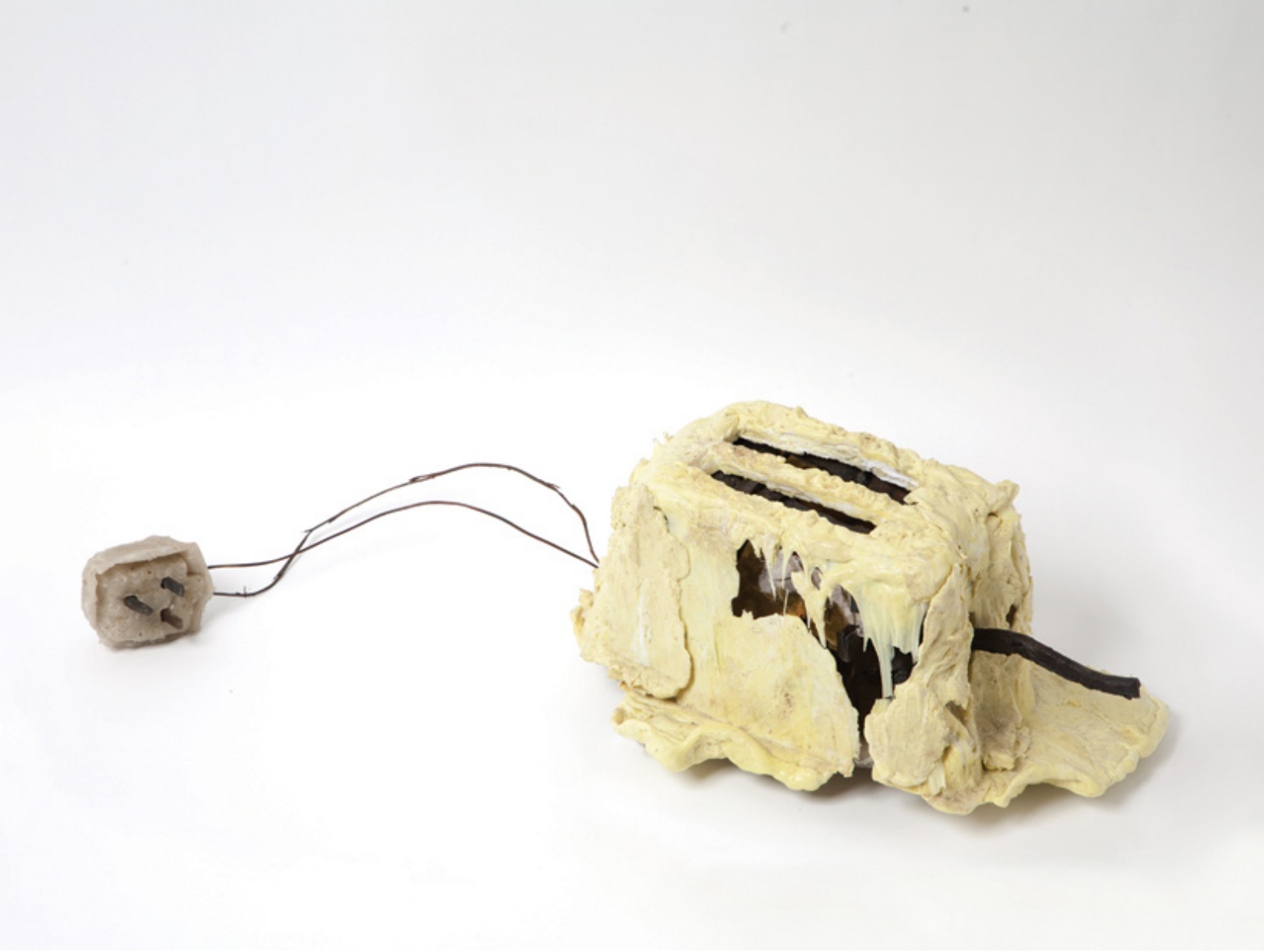

Figure 6

Thomas Thwaites
The Toaster Project
2009

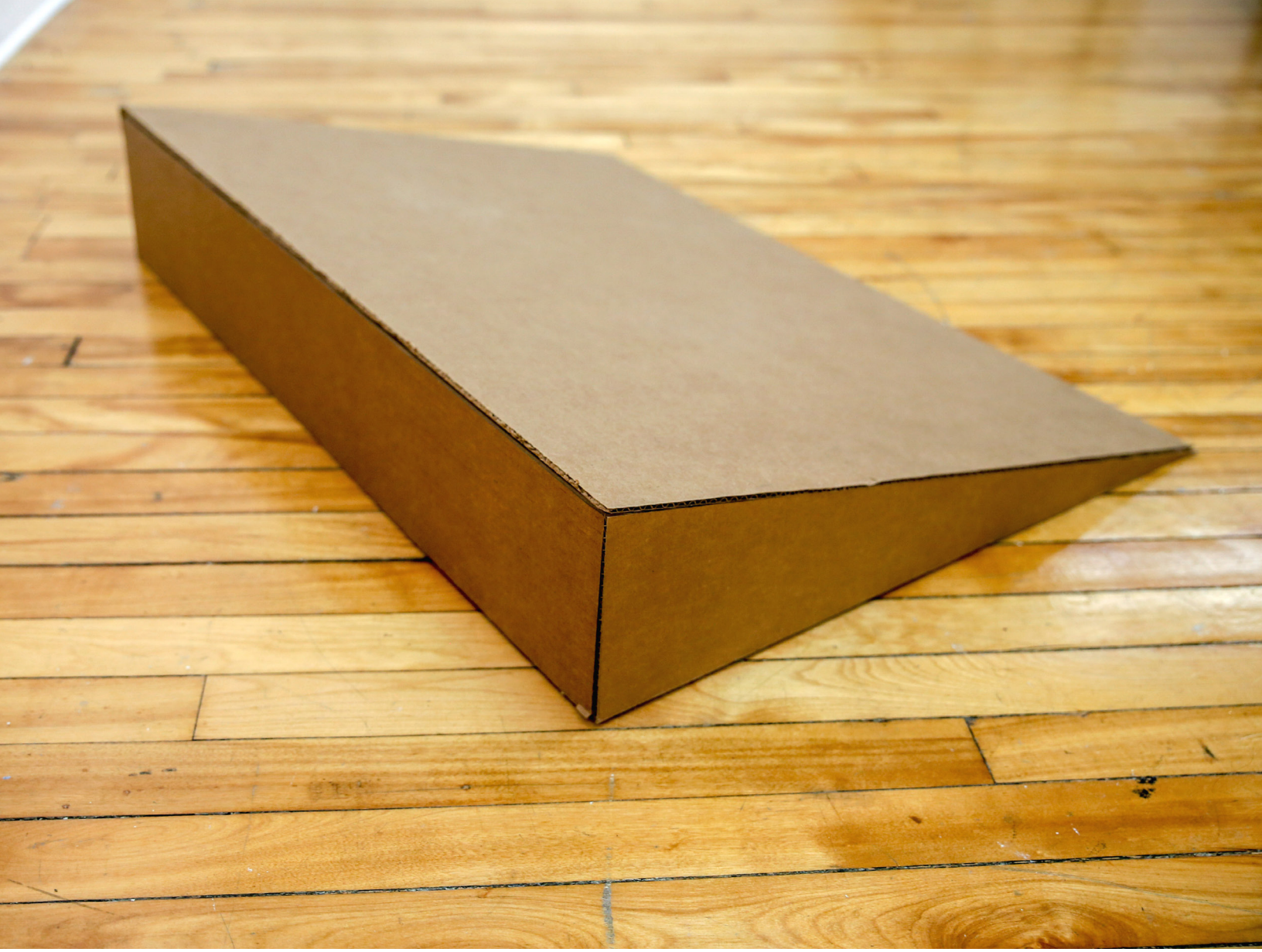

Figure 7

Cardboard Ramp
2018
Cardboard
6" x 32" x 24"

Photo: Arash Safavi

Figure 8

Various ramps
2018-2019
Cardboard, wood, linoleum, veneer, metal hardware
6" x 32" x 24" each

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 9

Wire Ramp
2019
Brazed copper wire
6" x 32" x 24"

Photo: Craig Rodmore

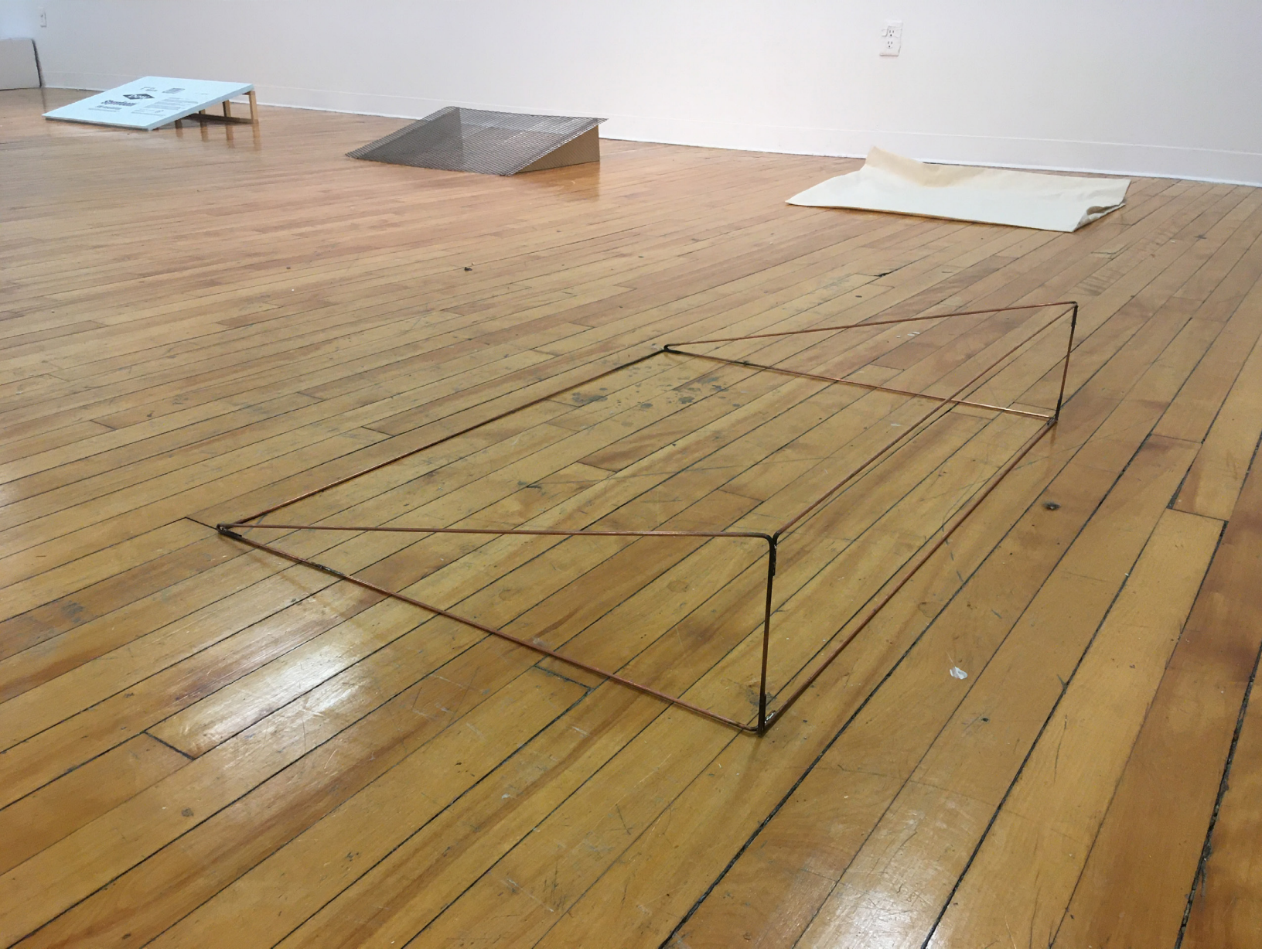

Figure 10

Various ramps
2019
Brazed copper wire, MDF, steel, wood, Styrofoam, muslin
6" x 32" x 24" each

Figure 11

Various ramps
2019
MDF, steel, wood, Styrofoam, muslin
6" x 32" x 24" each

Photo: Craig Rodmore

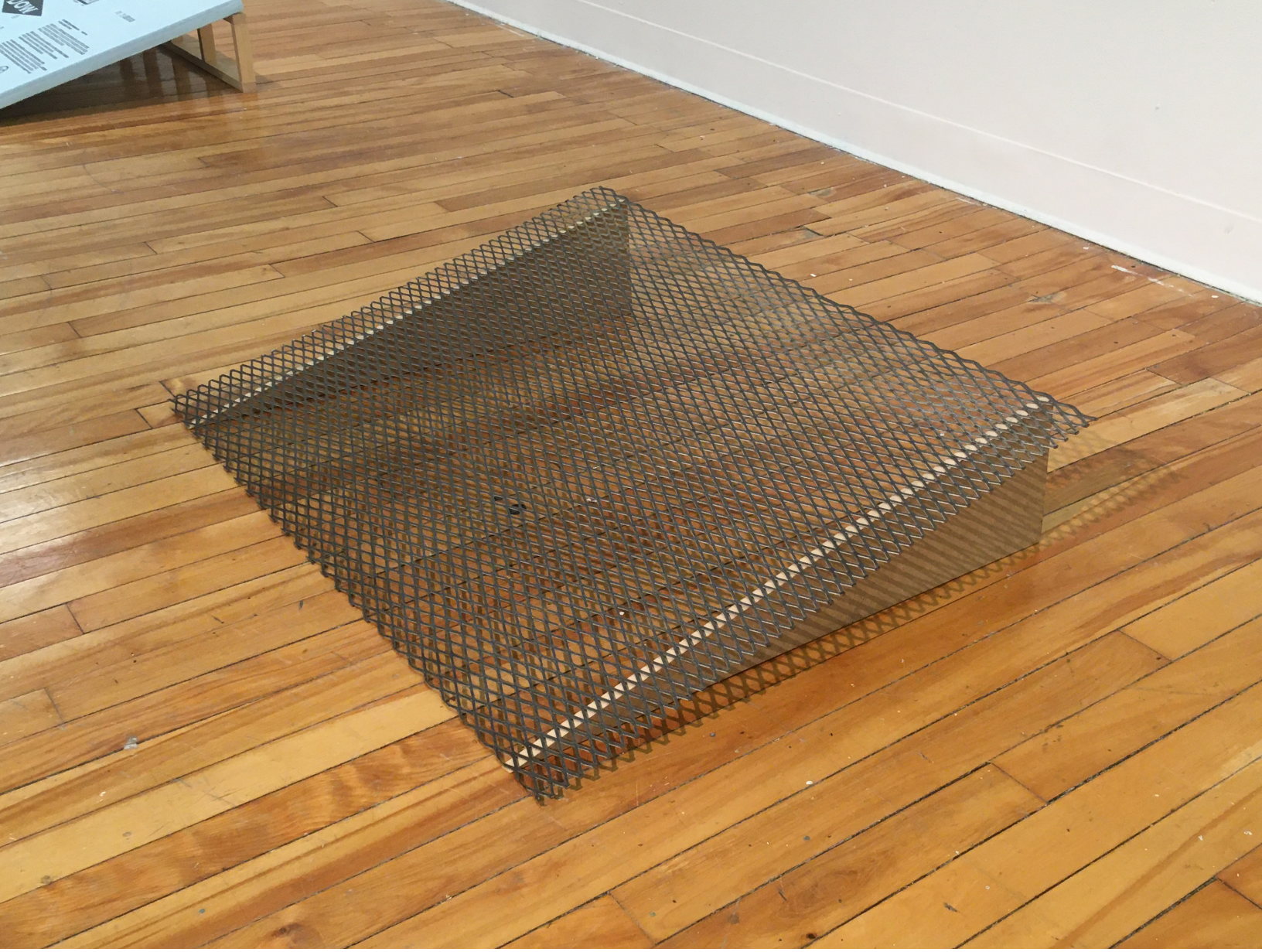

Figure 12

Metal Mesh Ramp
2019
Steel expanded metal sheet, MDF
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 13

Muslin Ramp (collaboration with Aisha Ali)
2019
Muslin
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 14

Tilt Ramp
2019
Plywood board, bicycle rack
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 15

Tilt Ramp
2019
Plywood board, bicycle rack
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 16

Precarious Ramp
Industrial trifold access ramp, wood
2019

Figure 17

Veneer Ramp
2019
Veneer, metal air duct vent covers
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 18

Linoleum Ramp
2019
Linoleum, plywood, MDF
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 19

Linoleum Ramp
2019
Linoleum, plywood, MDF
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 20

Kickdown Doorstop Ramp
2019
Kickdown doorstops, acrylic sheet, bubble wrap
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 21

Teal Angle
2019
Cardboard and acrylic-latex paint
44” x 72”

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 22

Teal Angle
2019
Cardboard and acrylic-latex paint
44” x 72”

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 23

Teal Angle
2019
Cardboard and acrylic-latex paint
44” x 72”

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 24

Judd Ramp (Untitled Object Fabricated and Rejected) (collaboration with Craig Rodmore)
2019
Acrylic, cardboard, toner on Tyvek, blue tape, four copies of Donald Judd Writings
6" x 32" x 24"

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 25

Judd Ramp (Untitled Object Fabricated and Rejected) (collaboration with Craig Rodmore)
2019
Acrylic, cardboard, toner on Tyvek, blue tape, four copies of Donald Judd Writings
6" x 32" x 24"

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 26

Eva Hesse
Repetition Nineteen III
1968
Fiberglass and polyester resin
Nineteen units, each 19 to 20 1/4" x 11 to 12 3/4"

Figure 27

Styrofoam Ramp
2019
Styrofoam, wood
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 28

Styrofoam Ramp
2019
Styrofoam, wood
6" x 32" x 24"

Figure 29

Beaded Balloons
2019
Balloon, seed beads
Approx. 3.5" long

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 30

Latex Balloons
2019
Latex
Various dimensions

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 31

Latex Balloons
2019
Latex
Various dimensions

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 32

Charcoal Cane Tips
2018
Charcoal
1.5" x 1" diameter

Photo: Craig Rodmore

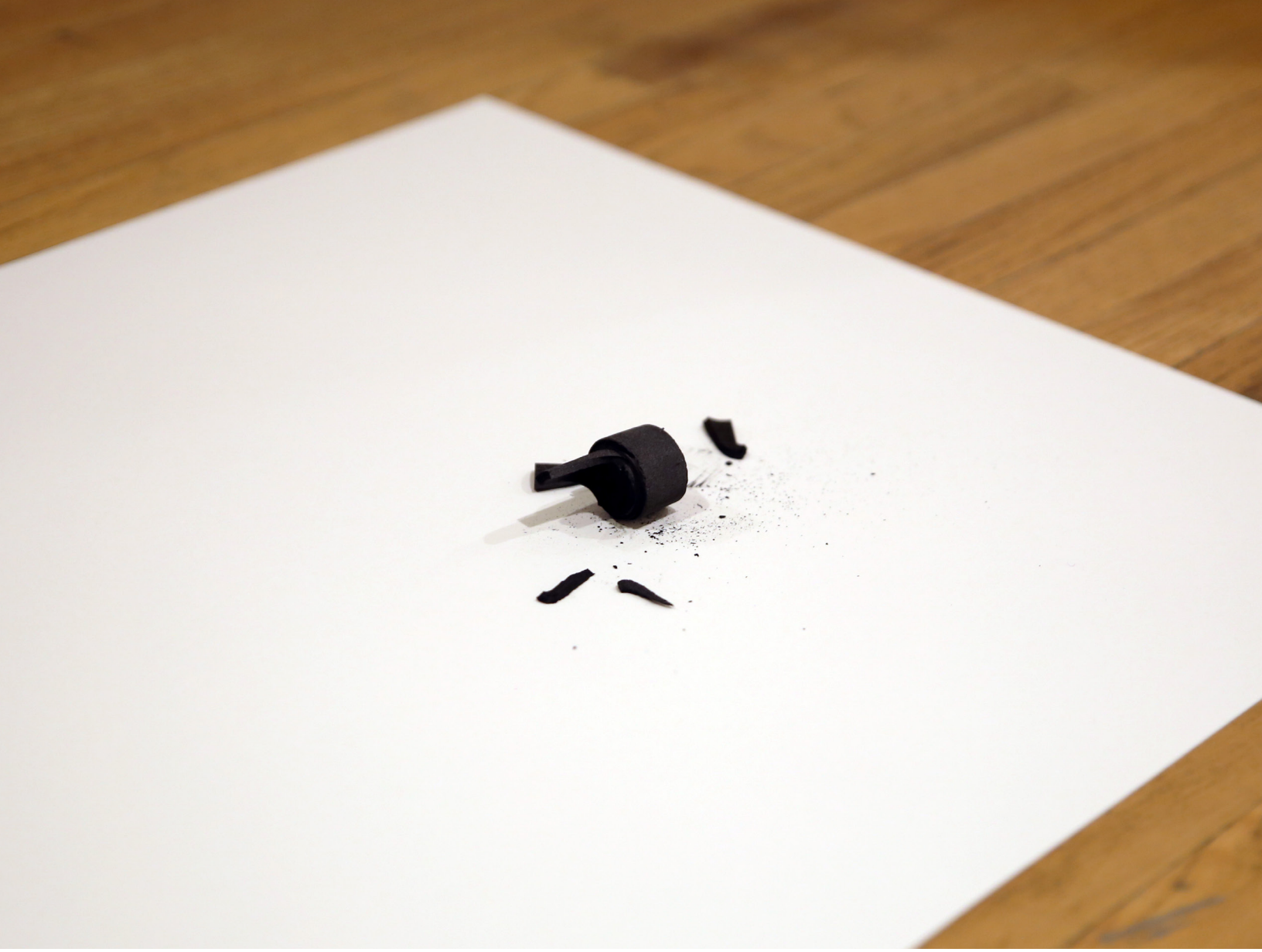

Figure 33

Charcoal Cane Tips
2018
Charcoal
1.5" x 1" diameter

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 34

Charcoal Cane Tips
2018
Charcoal
1.5" x 1" diameter

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 35

Charcoal Cane Tips
2018
Charcoal
1.5" x 1" diameter

Photo: Craig Rodmore

Figure 36

Crayon Cane Tips
2019
Wax crayon
1.5" x 1" diameter

Figure 37

Crayon Cane Tips
2019
Wax crayon
1.5" x 1" diameter

Figure 38

Crayon Cane Tips
2019
Wax crayon
1.5" x 1" diameter

Figure 39

Crayon Cane Tips
2019
Wax crayon
1.5" x 1" diameter

Figure 40

Accessibility Book (Whitechapel)
2019
Ink on paper
6" x 8.25" x 1.25"

Figure 41

Accessibility Reader 01
2019
Ink on paper
8.5" x 11" x 1"

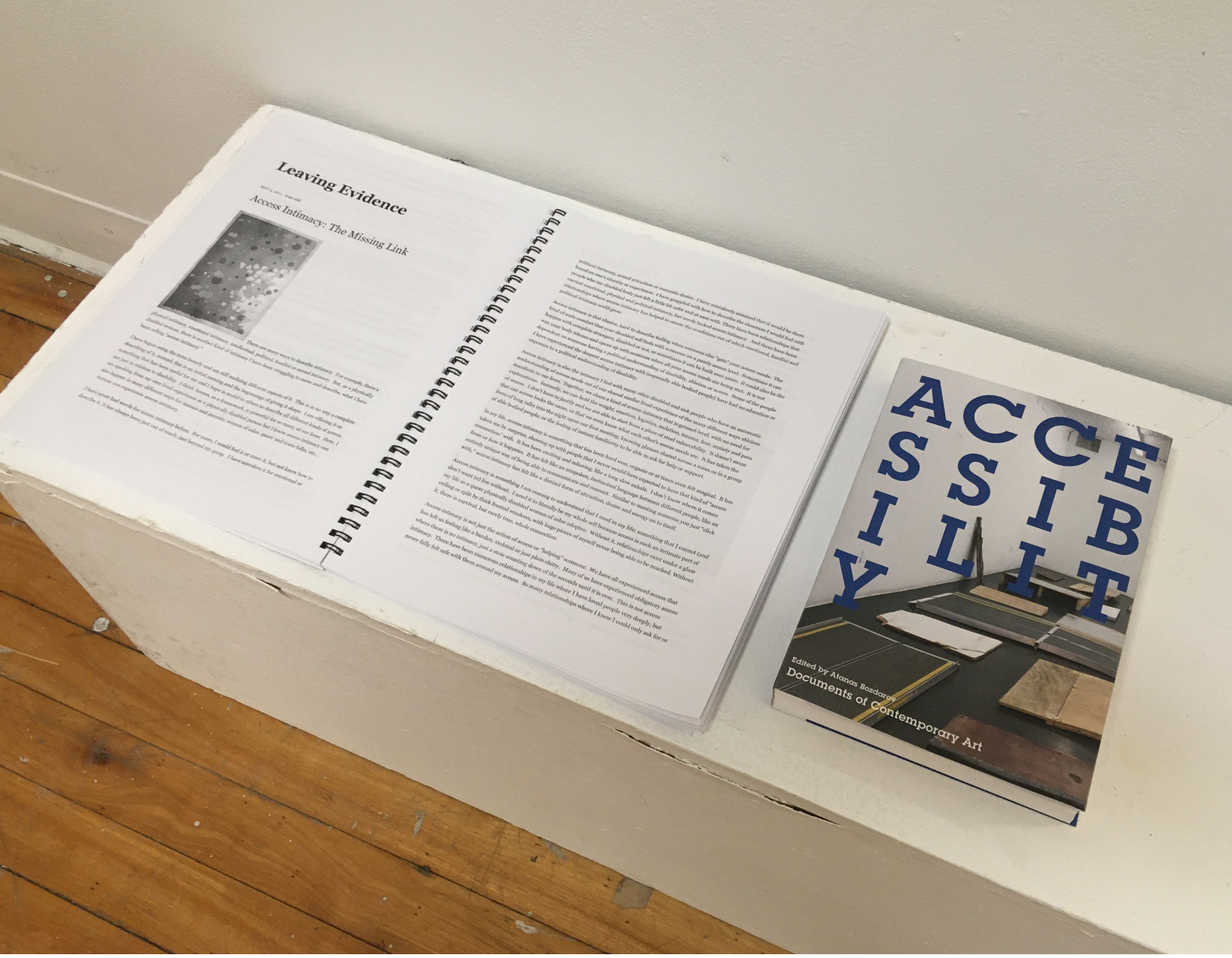

Figure 42

Accessibility Reader 01
2019
Ink on paper
8.5" x 11" x 1"

Figure 43

Martino Gamper
Inflation
2006

Figure 44

Martino Gamper
Charles and Ply
2006

Figure 45

Martino Gamper
A Basketful
2006

Figure 46

Martino Gamper
Hands On
2007

Figure 47

Martino Gamper
Plank Rocker
2006

Figure 48

Martino Gamper
Giro
2007

Figure 49

Park McArthur
Ramps
2010–2014
Various materials and dimensions

Figure 50

Park McArthur
Ramps
2010–2014
Various materials and dimensions

Figure 51

Park McArthur
Ramps
2010–2014
Various materials and dimensions

Figure 52

Worn-out Ramp
2019

Photo: Derek Sullivan

Figure 53

Doorstop Ramp
2019

Photo: Craig Rodmore