



Translating Experiences

A Little Commitment – Kiruna Stamel and Gareth Beliner

A Commission for DaDaFest International 2020 – Translations!

Podcast 1

Interview with Emma Round – AKA @Pseudodeviant on Twitter:

KIRUNA: Hello and welcome to Dada Fest International 2020, Translating experiences

GARETH: We're your hosts, Gareth Berliner and Kiruna Stamell and today was speaking to activist and Blogger Emma Round.

KIRUNA: These interviews were recorded, due to COVID, over Skype and Zoom so we apologise for any effect this has on the sound quality of the recording.

Hello everybody, we'd like to welcome Emma today.

Emma is a Blogger and activist who is based in the Midlands.

She's known online as Pseudo Deviant, if you want to find her on Twitter, and she's also got a blog, which is called Crip The Planet

Welcome Emma, is there anything I left off? Is there any way you'd like to describe yourself, or anything you want to add?

EMMA: No, I think that's about it like. I'm a queer crippled campaigner.

KIRUNA: Woohoo

EMMA: There we go, yeah. (Laughs)

GARETH: Emma, you have a blog that explores disability in society, and you focus a lot on language. So what model of disability describes your point of view?

EMMA: I use their radical social model as I call it, or a lot of people who remember the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

from the UK back in the 60s. The sort of language that they were using back then when they were coining the social model. So I'll talk about disabled people instead of people with disabilities. I'll talk about non-disabled people instead of able bodied people and you'll find me talking about Disablism instead of ableism. And if you want to talk about that in a bit and why I make those choices, I'm really happy to.

GARETH: In your Crip The Planet blog you recently said that wearing a label that makes you stand out as disabled, be a mobility aid, a lanyard, or a black triangle, simply makes it easier to be targeted by disablist people and state actors. So do you think a badge can sum up the disabled experience?

EMMA: As far as I'm concerned, and I think every disabled person who's lived in this world for a wee while will have found that there is a lot in this world that is set up against you that makes your life harder than it has to be. Your life wouldn't be so hard if it wasn't for having to jump through lots of hoops to prove your identity, to keep trying to let people know that, as a wheelchair user, you need to use an accessible toilet and things like that.

KIRUNA: I find it really interesting that there you are on the actual accessible toilet door, you're this symbol, in your wheelchair, and you're still having to say to people "Can I use the disabled loo please?"

EMMA: The issue isn't my being in a wheelchair like the issue is that people look at me and they think "Oh, you're too young to be disabled."

You don't fit my stereotype of a disabled person, and I'm going to challenge you because of this" and it's these stereotypes of disabled people which no disabled person ever actually fits, and they stereotypes

that all held in the eye of the beholder, as it were. Everybody's got a different stereotype about what a disabled person is and you never fit all of them and you always everyday come butting up against them. Like, no amount of having a wheelchair, in my experience, having a badge that says "I'm disabled" anything like that has ever made that stop.

GARETH: We were reading on your blog about the sunflower, kind of, scheme which I've never heard of before, and I identify as invisibly disabled as such, so I often encounter the struggle about if I need to, you know, I won't always use a disabled toilet but if, for instance I was disconnecting from my medical backpack, then I will use a disabled toilet, but to anybody else I'm a perfectly fine and able bodied bloke

walking into the disabled toilet with no reason seemingly to be going in there.

EMMA: In one respect. You can always have a symbol that to you and to a group of people represents yourselves. If invisibly disabled people find solace and community in union with the sunflower and that is excellent.

and I'm all for them using that to connect with one another. But I don't think that we should fool ourselves into believing that it's going to erase those experiences of disablism. Like, I'm in a lot of online groups with disabled people as I imagine you two are as well, and your listeners,

and there's already a lot of I've seen people claiming that they seem people abusing the sunflower lanyard scheme and saying "I'm okay, but so and so I saw in the store didn't look like they were disabled. I think they were just using it to get bonuses to queue jump to get extra assistance because they didn't want to wear a mask and it's the same kind of talk you get in the Blue Badge community. If you're ever around a group of wheelchair users for long enough, you'll start to hear some of them talking about how there are good Blue Badge user, but there are lots of people that abuse the scheme. There's no, when you dig into it, there's no actual proof. No one's checking the medical history of these people. No one knows if they are, it's just this feeling because those people don't meet that stereotype yet again.

KIRUNA: So are disabled people trying to translate the disabled experience for non-disabled gatekeepers. And that's just impossible.

EMMA: We are constantly, constantly begging the nondisabled audience, as it were, like up our everyday lives, to validate us to believe us to give us the scraps that we need so we can live even quasi-independently.

And I don't think that's right. We shouldn't be begging for their validation. In a just world, we wouldn't be begging for their validation.

Non-disabled people would understand that there are disabled people that exist, that there are people with impairments, differences in bodily and mental form and function to the social norms and that those people might need to use a larger toilet cubical, or might need a ramp without there being any fuss made about it, or shouldn't have to explain why they've asked for an easy reader menu at a restaurant. And it's ridiculous to me that we continue to push for this validation to keep jumping through the hoops to keep playing the game that's rigged against us.

KIRUNA: It's different, isn't it? From the Pride flag, which if you think about the Pride Flag, is a symbol of pride.

EMMA: Yeah

KIRUNA: whereas every single disabled symbol we're thinking of is a symbol that essentially says, to the non disabled community "I'm a little bit crap."

GARETH + EMMA: [Laughs]

KIRUNA: in this area so you need to make allowances for me"

This is the challenge with disability and translating the experience for our society. In order to get the help we have to throw ourselves at pity party, not a pride party.

GARETH + EMMA: Yeah, yeah

KIRUNA: One of the things I was really interested about on your blog is the language you were hearing within the LGBTQ plus community regarding their identity and opposing it or just opposing it to the disabled, probably not even consciously, but some of the language you were hearing and how that translated for you.

EMMA: Yes, what I want to do when I'm in the LGBTIQ, sort of, plus community is to feel safe and feel about like I found my tribe, but when I hear people using campaigning slogans which centre around "I'm LGBT, I am not disabled" and using disabled as being this sort of other place This bad place. "Don't include us with them. I'm not one of those"

and of course you do find there are lots of queer disabled people as well, but it's one of those things that I find really hurtful. I also find really telling, I think, that the disablism in our society is like it's so ingrained that without even really thinking, cos I don't think most of these campaigners have gone out of their way to try and hurt me

or to try and hurt people like us with their language.

GARETH: Where do you think the issues around language and disability are problematic?

EMMA: I think the language we use around disability and disablements is really confusing. We try and use the same word to say an awful lot of different things and it's not very helpful.

KIRUNA: Ableism versus disablism. What's the position on that? How do you see those two things as being better descriptions of what's happened, or... how do you see it?

EMMA: Disableism's the term that the The people from the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregations were talking something, Mike Oliver, Vic Finkelstein, that lot, Colin Barnes, some of the biggest disabled thinkers from the UK that really revolutionised our understanding, would all talk about disablism. Disablism was also used during, like, the large protests in the 90s, and the like. But in America, which has had in some ways much more medicalised understanding of disability and disablement ableism was much more popular a term. And with the advent of the

Internet, and the like, and there being a lot more American bloggers than UK bloggers out there, the American language and ableism seems to have come quite heavily into the United Kingdom, and for me, I don't think that it's- I don't like it very much. I understand lots of people do you like ableism and they think it's a much shorter, snappier term, and they think it describes things very well. I think ableism centres on ability

GARETH + KIRUNA: Yeah!

EMMA: and it sends an individual ability. I think the same of able bodied like, I think I'm perfectly able bodied. I use a wheelchair, but the rest of me works. Heck, I can bend in ways most non-disabled can't

GARETH + KIRUNA: [laughs]

EMMA: I value and call them disabled or don't suggest they're not able bodied because they can't do those things, like them with their knees that don't bend backwards. Disablism to me talks about, and focuses on, the fact that Disablement, the process of becoming a disabled person, is something that is forced on you, like it or not, by a society that perceives you as a disabled person. Or if you identify as a disabled person, reacts to that identification, it's oppression and marginalisation in the form of, again like, political and socio-economic forces. Ableism, and the like, anything that focuses on the individual and the individual's medical condition being the root of our oppression being the reason that we can't get into buildings, when it places the blame on me for having Ehlers Danlos syndrome for not being able to climb a flight of stairs safely instead of placing the blame on a society that has trained architects to keep building places with stairs and his set social norms that says stairs are more beautiful than ramps ever could be,

GARETH + KIRUNA: Yeah

EMMA: which is ridiculous to me.

KIRUNA: Yes

EMMA: I think that's really unhelpful. I think there will always be people with impairments. There will always be people with bodies and minds that go against the social norms at the time,

which I must say is highly subjective. What is a disability one day and what isn't a disability the next day does vary quite heavily.

GARETH: Emma's comment before about architects and sexy staircases being a priority over ramps, and then I started drifting off briefly, momentarily, and I apologise for thinking "oh, what's a sexy ramp" and then almost immediately remembered I've been to the Vatican, where there was a very sexy ramp that went all the way up to the top of the Vatican. That actually took around the building. I mean, it was quite incredible. And I suddenly thought "okay, there are sexy ramps and architects could do something about it"

KIRUNA: Well, thank you so much Emma and Gareth for your time.

It's been delightful to chat to you and we look forward to catching up with you one day at a socially appropriate distance.

EMMA: Thank you very much. It's getting real pleasure to chat to you both.

KIRUNA: This podcast was produced by Little Commitment and edited by Pete Gledhill.

GARETH: This was a Dada Fest 2020 Commission.