

Institution: Teesside University
Unit of Assessment: 34 Art and Design, History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: Changing Cultural Perceptions of Disability and Difference
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>McKeown is a major exponent of Disability Arts. Through his creative work in animation and performance he works to affect popular assumptions about disability. He seeks to affirm disability as a social construct and his work reflects, deconstructs and engages with the concepts of normalcy and the abnormal. He has become an important proponent of disability issues because of the international reach of his practice as an artist. His work stresses the pride and self-confidence of the disabled and expresses their wish to participate in, and be full members of, society. He has reached a large public and affected the terms of debate of the issues he acts as an ambassador for.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>McKeown is a Reader in Post-Production and Animation, and lectures in special effects, animation and games design. The research interests underpinning McKeown's work focus on an exploration of the cultural assumptions and societal views of normality and difference. He has made important contributions to the on-going societal and scientific debate on genetic enhancement and the issues of identity, wellbeing and the cultural representation of disability in contemporary society.</p> <p>McKeown is a congenitally disabled artist. The term covers work made by disabled artists that addresses the oppression and marginalisation of 'disability' in the same way as race, gender and sexuality have been explored by artists. His work reframes historical narratives related to impairment groups that may no longer exist in the near future, such as those suffering from Spina Bifida. His work is a series of multiplatform, interventionist, participatory events which would have us accept disabled people's impairments, and their associated irregularity and asymmetry, as other ways of being normal. His work crosses creative and technical boundaries including film, animation, still image and sculpture. He draws on his 20-year professional background in computer games and special effects prior to 2004.</p> <p>On joining Teesside University in 2004 he began to research into how disability was, and had been, represented in the field of visual art. He also had the opportunity to develop expertise in 3D motion capture by developing the digital animation resources at the university. These two enabled him to construct the theory and plan the practical implementation of his first research outcome. Through his links with the disability arts community he met Dr Paul Darke, Director of the disability arts organisation Outside Centre based in Wolverhampton. Darke assisted in the early development of this outcome, the animation <i>Motion Disabled</i>. <i>Motion Disabled</i> received funding from the Wellcome Trust in 2008 and was completed in 2009/10. It explores physically disabled bodies represented by anonymous 3D avatars and employs 3D motion-capture to reveal their movements. Following in the footsteps of Muybridge and Marey, McKeown focuses the viewer's attention on the avatars' motions as they undertake what are, for them, 'normal' actions. In realising the project he used a trans-disciplinary approach, employing concepts such as Gait Analysis and computer games' interactive technologies.</p> <p>McKeown furthered his exposure of normative perceptions of ability and disability by producing an animated short <i>All For Claire</i> (2010) which uses animation as a vehicle specifically to create a discourse around the issues of (dis-)ability in women.</p> <p>In 2010 working with USA in Washington D.C. he produced a synchronised worldwide adaption of <i>Motion Disabled</i> shown on 3 December, UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities, in 20 countries and 25 locations, including at the UN in New York.</p> <p>McKeown's advocacy for disability and difference led to his collaboration on <i>Prometheus Awakes</i> in 2012. He was invited by Bradley Hemmings, Director of the Paralympics opening ceremony and Greenwich and Docklands International Festival to become involved in this international project.</p>

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McKeown was responsible for the large-scale animated environmental projections central to the work. The performance integrated large-scale projection, giant puppets and choreography involving a cast of over 60 disabled and non-disabled volunteers, with Graeae Theatre and La Fura dels Baus, from Barcelona.

McKeown developed the installation *Motion Disabled: Unlimited* (2012), a London 2012 Festival commission, from the legacy of *Motion Disabled*. It features the body movements of some of the UK's most famous Paralympians as a means to extend his message of the disabled as full, active members of society.

3. References to the research

See REF2's and section 5.

Digital animations and Performances.

Motion Disabled. Animation. First shown 2009, with revisions and additions in 2010.

All For Claire. Animation, November, 2010.

Prometheus Awakes. Outdoor theatre, performance and video projection, Summer 2012.

Motion Disabled Unlimited. Performance, 2012-13.

Authored chapters in books

'Are They Laughing At Us Or With Us? Disability in Fox TV's Animated Series Family Guy', Chapter in the book *Different Bodies: Disability in Film & Television* edited by Marja Mogk, Publisher: McFarland USA. Publication date: November 2013

Grants include:

People Award, Wellcome Trust. Simon McKeown and Dr. Paul Darke, *Motion Disabled*. £29,870.00, award date October 2008. (Plus £6,000 extension grant in 2009).

Arts Council England – Unlimited Award – *Motion Disabled: Unlimited*. £50,000.00 in 2011.

4. Details of the impact

McKeown's creative work has contributed to the effort to transform global perceptions and values surrounding normality, the abnormal and society's genetically diverse future. It is estimated that 15-20% of the world's population has a disability and that over 45 million in the EU alone have a long-standing health problem or disability. The need to discuss and confront the issue of disability, and the attendant issues of cultural capital, have never been more important, as was recognised in his *Revealing Culture* exhibition at the Smithsonian in 2010. This juried international exhibition was part of the 2010 International VSA Festival, an unprecedented event featuring 600 artists, performers and educators from all over the world, introduced by Jean Kennedy Smith.

McKeown has engendered change in societal perspectives on disability, movement and alternative body forms and has made an important contribution to the on-going debate on perceptions of ability and disability, through his pioneering approaches to visual investigation in the domain of Disability Arts and the arts in general. As a consequence of *Motion Disabled*, McKeown was one of thirteen artists commissioned by the British Council and Arts Council England to receive their own 'Unlimited' London 2012 Festival award, a series of events that celebrated arts and culture by disabled and deaf artists on an unprecedented scale.

McKeown's work sets out to raise questions about the validity of the human experience. It problematises the medical model of disability and asks whether we should consider human form in a biodiverse manner – should we appreciate disability and disabled as an intrinsic element to normal life? Uniquely his artworks confront the viewer with new experiences of the body and movement: for example, in *Motion Disabled: Unlimited* (which is the 2012 edition of his internationally exhibited exhibition *Motion Disabled*). The 2012 impression studies the body and movement of some of the UK's most famous Paralympians and takes the work into new and exciting directions including a large 10m tall inflatable sculpture and smart phone applications. The UK's largest inflatable sculpture, entitled *The Last Thalidomide* formed the centrepiece of a series of multi-platform interventionist participatory works and was launched at Oxford's Olympic Torch Relay celebration in front of an audience of 20,000 before touring nationally throughout the summer of 2012.

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Through the various projects' lifetimes, and because of their continuing legacy, it is evident that McKeown's work has beneficially impacted the following fields:

Fine Art: *Motion Disabled* and its 2012 *Unlimited* edition have been exhibited globally, been a focus for many themed exhibitions and been treated as a major work given large-scale presentations. In the four years since its inception in 2009 it has received major screenings in London, South Korea (2009), Washington D.C. (2010), Glasgow (2010), Dublin, and Melbourne (2010) and was screened globally in over 15 countries worldwide on 3rd December 2010 in the event organised by VSA. McKeown was awarded DadaFest International Artist of the Year as a result. McKeown's work was showcased all over the UK in 2012 and was a major feature on the BBC arts website, The Space, and was reviewed on the BBC arts website The Strand with 40 million listeners (<http://www.pushmeplease.co.uk/artists/simon-mckeown/>).

Art and Cultural Development: *Motion Disabled* continues to push boundaries by raising the profile of disability, disabled artists and Disability Art. Disability Art finds itself in a situation analogous to black artists in the 1970s whose work would not be exhibited due to the underlying societal prejudice that existed at the time. McKeown has benefitted disabled artists, Disability Arts and the arts in general. *Motion Disabled* has been cited as an artwork that brings images of disability to the arts and the creative cultural agenda with honesty and integrity. His *Motion Disabled: Unlimited* work recently formed part of the acclaimed 'Disabled by Normality' exhibition, initiated by the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague, Czech Republic, May 2013.

Policy and Civilisation: In 2010 *Motion Disabled* was invited to take a major part in the '40 years of Disability Legislation' exhibition held in the UK Parliament from 1st March – 5th March 2010. The exhibition was organised by The Office for Disability Issues which highlights issues of ability and disability in British society. The work has been widely utilised as a vehicle to highlight issues of (dis)ability. It was given a simultaneous global screening on the 3 December 2010 in celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This demonstrates its capacity as an artwork to give social and cultural form to the disability awareness agendas of International Organization on Arts and Disability, such as VSA, governments and disability-engaged NGOs.

Science, Dance and Sport: In 2010 *Motion Disabled* was exhibited on Friday 21st to Sunday 23rd of October in Central Manchester, as part of Manchester Science Festival, presented by Manchester Metropolitan University's Institute for Biomedical Research into Human Movement and Health. *Motion Disabled* as a work in itself continues to be shown globally within the contexts of science, art and dance as in its 10 year feature at @Bristol, the Bristol Science Museum as part of the major multi million pound Wellcome Trust sponsored exhibition 'All About Us'.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact**Global screening captures people with disabilities in motion**

<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/News/2010/News/WTX063691.htm>

"The Wellcome Trust is screening British artist Simon McKeown's video installation 'Motion Disabled' outside its headquarters on Euston Road in London today, in celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities."

2nd United Nations Enable Film Festival (UNEFF) 2010

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1562>

[2nd DESA Disability Film Festival](#) (2010)

Department of VSA and Accessibility, Washington. 'Revealing Culture', Smithsonian, June 8th to August 29th. Visitor numbers 578,114

<http://newsdesk.si.edu/releases/revealing-culture-exhibition-opens-smithsonian-s-ripley-center>

"Revealing Culture," an exhibition highlighting the works of contemporary artists with disabilities, opens at the Smithsonian's S. Dillon Ripley Center on June 8, and runs through Aug. 29. The multisensory exhibition features more than 130 works of art in a broad range of media—installations, video, performance, painting, sculpture and printmaking—from emerging and eminent

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artists with disabilities in the United States and abroad.”

Access Diversity and inclusion. Projecting into the Future, Oct 09

<http://www.syncleadership.co.uk/Projecting+into+the+Future>

“The afternoon will use the artwork *Motion Disabled* as a case study to provoke discussion and debate and include perspectives from other artists working in the field. It will also provide an opportunity to get up to date information on Unlimited - the UK’s largest ever celebration of arts and disability culture which will use the power of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to profile the creative talents and ambitions of disabled people and to challenge traditional perceptions of disability.”

Motion Disabled Unlimited

<http://www.motiondisabledunlimited.com/exhibition/>

“*Motion Disabled: Unlimited* is the 2012 edition of Simon McKeown’s internationally exhibited exhibition [Motion Disabled](#).”

British Council

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/press-office/press-releases/over-820000-awarded-to-artists-for-unlimited/>

“The London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, the UK Arts Councils and the British Council have today awarded £820,000 funding to a new round of major commissions for Unlimited, the ground-breaking programme for the Cultural Olympiad. Images for media use of the 13 commissioned artists can be downloaded at <http://mm.gettyimages.com/mm/nicePath/locog?nav=pr145834050>.”

Over £820,000 awarded to artists for Cultural Olympiad programme Unlimited – Arts Council

<http://press.arts council.org.uk/Press-Releases/Over-820-000-awarded-to-artists-for-Cultural-Olympiad-programme-Unlimited-47e.aspx>

“Simon McKeown – *Motion Disabled*. This Unlimited commission will be a large-scale development of Simon McKeown’s previous work, *Motion Disabled*, and will use a complex mix of technologies and software usually associated with the film and computer gaming industries. Using motion capture, Simon will record the signature movements of disabled athletes’ motion, which will be combined with 3D software to create large inflatable sculptures using rapid prototyping techniques. Paralympic body shapes and actions will be presented as large models, and will be played out on both large screens and smart phones, challenging perceptions and invigorating our view of human motion and body shape.”

The Times Newspaper – Culture Section. Review by film director Ken Russell, January 27th

2009: <http://www.wellcomecollection.org/whats-on/the-identity-project/events-nationwide/motion-disabled.aspx>

Disability Now, interview entitled ‘The McKeown Effect’, October 2012:

<http://www.disabilitynow.org.uk/article/mckeown-effect>

Prometheus Awakes - Reviews

<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/jun/26/prometheus-awakes-theatre-review>

Avatar or Motion Disabled by Alison Wilde

<http://www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk/Alison-Wilde?item=526&itemoffset=7>

“In a year that Simon McKeown used motion capture technology to represent real disabled people to creative and captivating effect, it seems wrong that Cameron should use the same technology and his obscenely massive budget to represent disability in such a poor and pointless manner...”

Disability News Service – Influence Index

“The aim of The List is to highlight some of the many disabled people who make a difference in modern Britain. As with other such indexes – the Power List of Britain’s most influential black people, the Independent On Sunday’s Pink List, and Radio 4’s Women’s Hour Power List – the idea is to rank people from a certain group in terms of their current influence within society.”

<http://disabilitynewsservice.com/2013/04/influence-index-test-post/>