

ANTI-MANUAL ON ACCESSIBILITY: RESETTING BODY AND SOCIETY




#Foralltosee Cover image description: rectangular canva in black, white and gray, with people with different disabilities spread throughout the image. In the center of the picture, there is a wheelchair user in front of a series of stairs. In the background there is a blind person with a walking stick. On the left, a person with a walking aid and a profile portrait with a hearing aid. In the bottom, there is a walking person carrying a flag in the right, and a wheelchair user in the left corner holding a poster, representing both activism and demands for the rights of people with disabilities. On the right of the foreground, a person with two crutches. Still in the foreground, the only man wearing bright colors, in a red shirt and blue pants, walks with the support of a cane, looks at the black and white silhouettes and also sees himself in shades of gray. End of description.

AN ANTI-MANUAL?

Why “anti”? What drives the choice of this category as the one to address our purpose in this material? What concepts of disability, accessibility, access, participation, and inclusion inform this attempt to produce a new way of communication and social interaction in environments of exchange and knowledge production? After all, what can be understood by an anti-manual and what is at stake when we propose to work on accessibility in these terms?

Most conventional materials produced on accessibility aim to “empower,” “teach,” and “inform” about the “best practices” for including people with disabilities in events and public spaces. These productions strive to address the urgency of making participation accessible for everyone through tips on technological and attitudinal resources that enable the elimination or reduction of barriers faced by people with disabilities. It is an important step towards constructing more accessible environments, and we will reference some of them at the end of the text. However, several manuals and quality guides, concerning regulations and resources, have minimized awareness of **the struggles faced by people with disabilities** and their specificities, even when they involve internal singularities within the same disability.



[Click here to watch the documentary “História do Movimento Político das Pessoas com Deficiências no Brasil” \(“History of the Political Movement of People with Disabilities in Brazil”\)](#)

Recently, demands for accessibility have been more forcefully extended to digital platforms, which have required new ways of working and communicating bodily and sensorially.

In the video produced in conjunction with this anti-manual, Marco Antônio Gavério, PhD candidate in Sociology at UFSCar and coordinator of the ANPOCS Disability and Accessibility Committee (2019-2020 term), talks a little about the dimension of **accessibility as a social technology**. This perspective walks hand in hand with the production of this text on access and inclusion practices in the world. Gavério's words point out that this material was designed to get the general academic community "out of their shell". Thus, our purpose is not only to highlight the need to overcome communicational and technological barriers (avoiding as far as possible the normativity of a "guide" or a "manual"), but also to problematize the very ideas of access and inclusion.



#Foralltosee: Artwork with a navy blue background; in the center of the image five overlapping bodies, aligned to the bottom center of the image, five overlapping bodies decrease in size from top to bottom. They are within one another and their faces are heading right. They appear as if one "crip" body is 'inside' another body, and so on, like a 'Russian doll'. The first silhouette, in beige, is that of a man with a hearing aid; the second, with a pink image, shows a man in a wheelchair; the third, with a red image, shows a blind woman wearing sunglasses and holding a walking stick; the fourth, with a gray image, shows a man with an amputated left arm; and the last, with a blue image, is a woman with an invisible disability, perhaps psychosocial or intellectual. End of description.

[Watch Marco Gavério's video here](#)

#ProTip: [You will not regret taking a look at the PCDLegal website. There, you will find important documents, such as the LBI \(Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities\)! Just click here:](#)

Even though the notions of barriers have been conceived for some years now from an ethical, political and socio-cultural perspective, they are still placed as individual, specific demands limited to disabled bodies, in practice.

We propose that physical, behavioral and cognitive techniques and technologies be thought of and practiced while having as a paradigm a broader definition of accessibility, based on the principles of disability justice (Mingus, 2010).

*This definition focuses on **reshaping the notion of barriers**, seeking to achieve actual access that comprehends people as a whole. That does not mean failing to focus on the demands for social and political inclusion of people with disabilities, a section of the population crossed by multiple historical forms of social-political discrimination and inequality.*

This is why we are proposing a reflection on accessibility as something related to participation and social inclusion of people with disabilities, but, without being limited to practices that aim to “segment” or “specify” these individuals again. In other words, we propose the idea of an **anti-accessibility**, which presents expanded ways of thinking about interaction and practices that transform the relation between individuals and society. The experience of disability is diverse and complex, and it is never in its definitive form. The experiences of disability, as well as the practices and knowledge that specifically target this population segment, are under steady political dispute and sociohistorical construction.

Our ideas are based on an approach that seeks to **‘cripple’** the accessibility practices that still depend on norms and body standards to make certain “diversions” legible and manageable.

‘Cripple’ is brought here in the sense of decolonizing, mutilating, deforming, and bruising the hegemonic mentality on disability, access and inclusion, causing ruptures in it.



#Foralltosee: Rectangular design divided horizontally into two parts. In the upper part, the background is black and, in the center, there is a white human silhouette facing a gray human silhouette. At the bottom, the shadow of the white figure appears in black and upside down. This black shadow is guided by a white guide dog wearing a blue vest. The gray figure of the upper part also has an upside-down shadow, but in gray. On the sides of the bottom part, there are other upside-down bodies in light and dark green, red, light and dark blue, purple and lilac, representing men and women without disabilities. At the bottom, there is also a greenish circle in the center with yellow around it, reminiscent of the sun. End of description.

The approach is also a broader and more critical political-epistemological practice of the relationship between accessibility and universal design. Here, the idea of "universal design" can be harmful and is not separate from the demands and political conflicts organized by people with disabilities themselves. According to researcher Aimie Hamraie (2010), the understanding that universal design means something "neutral", "flexible" and made "on demand" based on certain specifications of bodily and behavioral variability is quite problematic. In this sense, we suggest cultivating strategic doubts regarding the certainties of what we consider "universal." In other words, we propose avoiding the direct link between what is universal and what is a standard body or a pattern of human behavior.

These categories may seem complex at first. However, when we start to apply these concepts and attitudes to reality, we realize how actions that we often understood to be aimed at a person with a "type of disability" actually encompass a practice of inclusion of many different corporealities and ways of being part of the world.

If we continue to think of the ramp "for the wheelchair user", the subtitles "for the deaf", the audio description "for the blind", we end up assuming that if there is no one with these disabilities in a specific space, these resources are unnecessary, and we will continue to have "on demand" accessibility management as a consequence.



By focusing on barriers, and not just individuals, we all benefit from the actions that allow bodies to expand and interactions to diversify, enabling the contemplation of different human ways of experiencing the world and learning. After all, we learn in different ways: some people have greater ease of understanding and visual memory, others have a keen ear for details and tones; some need writing to understand an argument, while others can access images through descriptions.

This material is an attempt to expand bodies and reflect on our intelligences, sensory experiences, and multiple forms of communication!

EXPANDING WHAT WE ACKNOWLEDGE AS BODY = AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF POLITICIZING DIFFERENCES

The multiple experiences lived by people with disabilities become more complex when we think about their **intersections with social categories** such as class, race, gender, age, sexuality, religion, among others. Being a black, elderly woman with an intellectual disability, for example, is a different experience from the possible experiences of a blind, white, young man. We could describe these distinctions in terms of **access to economic and social well-being, political participation, and the conditions for critical citizenship**. And for this to be achieved, it is essential that we combat racism, sexism, LGBTphobia and ableism.



We define **ableism** as the conception present in the social imaginary that tends to consider people with disabilities as less fit or capable, simply because they have a bodily, sensory, intellectual or psychosocial difference. Ableism is the attitude of considering people with disabilities as non-equal and “incapable” of managing their own lives, seeing them as without autonomy, dependent, helpless, asexual, condemned to an eternal and economically dependent life, even seeing them as unacceptable in their social images or as less human.

The differences categorized by the sociocultural notion of disability lead us to problematize forms of "functioning" that we consider to be almost second nature. Bodily ways of moving, relating and doing things in everyday life and in the academic world, which are implicit in architectural and communicational patterns, sensory-motor parameters and pedagogical technologies and practices. In this way, our practices tend to be organized around bodily and behavioral standards and parameters that are agglutinated in the idea of "**ability**". There is nothing natural about our bodily ways of existence. These are ways of acting, perceiving and orienting oneself that are shaped by certain **social frameworks that privilege certain types of bodies and behaviors over others**. And the same normative standards that make certain bodies appear normal also generate the internalized experience of abnormality in disability – the standards of lack, incapacity and inadequacy that are often considered embodied in the process of becoming a person with a disability.

To know more:

(dis)abled bodies

Anti-ableism, politicization of disability and cultural accessibility

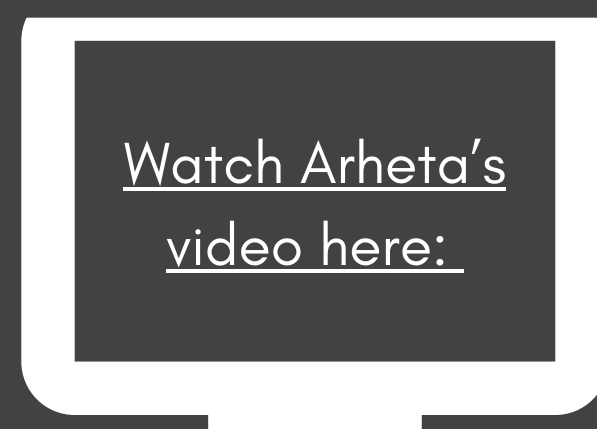
It is one thing to understand ableism as a concept that speaks of forms of discrimination against people with disabilities based on the assumption of body normativity in architectural spaces, institutions, teaching practices, ways of communication or interaction, for example. Another thing is **recognizing ableism at the level of experience**, realizing how deeply our bodies are imbued with ableism – and this kind of understanding isn't just intellectual, it needs to be embodied and go through the dimension of lived experience. This is necessary to provoke, even, some degree of awareness and disruption of patterns that are so ingrained in us that they are considered natural.

This is our invitation in this anti-manual: to move beyond one's own bodily conceptions of reality and imagine other ways of being and acting in the world, with the expectation that encountering differences will promote the expansion and diversification of ways to interact, communicate, perceive, touch, and move in both virtual and physical environments.

VIRTUAL ACCESSIBILITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIVERSE BODIES

The [simplified graphic material in the slides](#) accompanying this anti-manual provides several examples of how the 'shift' towards barriers and universal design as a paradigm of accessibility functions in the practice of inclusion. Has anyone ever stopped to think that good lighting and synchronization between sound and image on the internet, which allows lip-reading, the reading of facial expressions, and other non-verbal communications, is not just an accessibility feature for deaf people? It is a practice that helps in the understanding of what is being said, requiring less focused attention on a single sense, making interactions less tiring for everyone.

The practice of **describing images** not only makes visual content accessible to blind people, but it is also an experience that **broadens our ways of perceiving, enjoying, and communicating images**. Arheta Andrade points it out when she talks about description and audio description as both resources and poetics in another video recorded for this material.



#Foralltosee: Rectangular design with a black square in the center, surrounded by colorful bands and drawings of human and animal figures. The predominant colors around the black square are red, yellow, pink, blue, green, white and lilac. On the right side of the black square, a human figure in white is holding the guide dog's harness with their left hand. Their right hand, outside the square, takes on the colors of its surroundings and holds the hand of another human figure depicted in blue, red, lilac, and green, also outside the black square. The guide dog's body is half inside the black square, in white, and half outside the square in beige with a red vest. Outside the square, near its left edge, there are two colorful figures. One of them has a ponytail. To the left of these two figures, in the foreground, there are two more colorful figures. In the upper left corner, there are two columns, one in yellow and the other in green. On top of the latter, there is a small all-black human figure. In the center, still in the upper part of the black square, there is a colorful dragon with two wings, one in blue and the other in pink. The dragon's pink head has two ears and an open mouth, breathing fire. In the upper right corner, there is a sun in red and yellow. In the corner of the middle right ground, a colorful human figure with a ponytail stands in front of a table with a bottle on it. In the lower right corner, we see two profiles. One is blue and the other is yellow. They are surrounded by small colorful strokes. In the lower left corner, a slender human figure from the waist up, with a light green body, wears a red crown on its head and points a rod at a blue dragon with colorful mane and fins. Only the dragon's head is visible. End of description.

The need to raise your hand, wait for your turn to speak, avoid talking over someone else, and being as clear and concise as possible with what you have to say not only ensure that sign language interpreter can keep up with the conversation and that subtitle technologies can accurately identify words for transcription, but also facilitate dialogue among everyone. It encourages more attentive and respectful listening to each other's speaking time.

As Dienuza Costa and Anahí Guedes de Mello tell us, when reflecting on their ways of communicating in the world, a virtual (and also physical) environment that incorporates these communicational practices will certainly be more welcoming to autistic people and/or those with other neurodiversities, who have **different attention spans and perceptions of the world**. In a disruptive communication environment, they may feel overwhelmed and overstimulated, losing focus on communication more easily. This seemingly simple **attitudinal approach** transforms the entire environment into a more sensory-friendly, less exhausting, more egalitarian, respectful, and inclusive space for everyone!

To Know More:

Make sure to read the excellent article [Academic Life in Social Isolation: How Not to Make It Even More Exclusionary](#), which brings to light some precautions to take when transitioning our interactions from in-person to virtual, considering the diversity of corporealities and experiences of the people we interact with.

[Watch Dienuza Costa's video here:](#)

The rules of conduct and the implicit codes of time or movement that structure our ways of communication in the virtual environment are informed by a specific and standardized body, based on a universal ideal of a subject conceived as neutral or "normal", without considering the multiple variations in our ways of speaking, listening, seeing, navigating, thinking, or reacting. Entering a bright screen to conduct much of our academic interactions is part of the contemporary experience faced during the Covid-19 pandemic that requires temporarily canceling or excluding much of the immediate environment around us.

Can everyone actually do that? What about those who have young children at home, elderly people requiring care, live with others in an area on the outskirts, or need constant attention like going to the bathroom, drinking water, or eating in short periods of time?

Breaks, breaths, moments of moving and stretching the body are practices of care and self-care that embrace all types of bodies in this new approach of interaction that we are intensely experiencing and learning to adapt to. The flow of exchanges in a virtual room does not occur at the same pace as in-person meetings. Not all bodies perform their participation and presence in these spaces with the same readiness and timing. Not everyone can open multiple windows on a computer screen to follow information at the same speed. The time it takes to mute and unmute the microphone depends on the adjustments a body needs for participation. Navigating the virtual environment also happens in different ways, depending on the sensory channel the person is using. We must take into account that vision and hearing are senses that operate very differently!

Vision allows instant global access to context. While hearing takes more time since access to information is sequential. For example, a photo is grasped by vision almost instantly, but it takes much longer to describe it verbally.

When it comes to hearing, a sound becomes 'instant' for a hearing person, but it does not process the same way for many deaf individuals, once auditory information reaches the ears of those who can hear, while deaf people need to seek the same information in other ways, such as 'seeing voices' and/or using auditory technologies.

The digital subscription form for an event might be inaccessible for blind people and for people with low vision if the website hasn't been developed following W3C's guidelines.

To know more:

Get to know the "Web para Todos" campaign and learn valuable tips to test the navigation of a website, design accessible forms and to describe images or graphs!

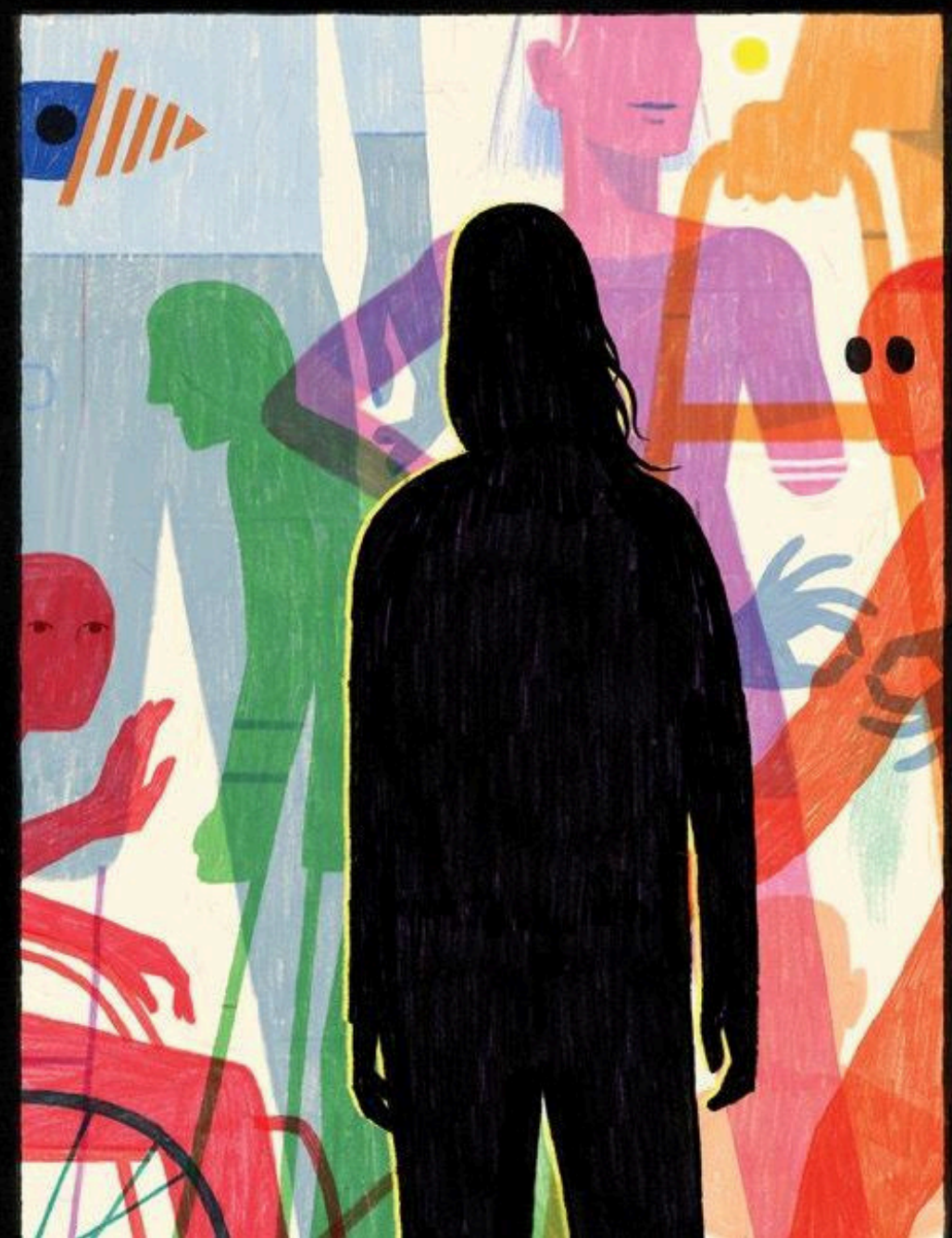
We are all experiencing an abrupt shift in how we relate, teach, and learn in **virtual environments**. **Other sensory and cognitive modalities of presence** are the ones that overload some channels of perception while, on the other hand, can immobilize the body.

- What are the conditions of circulation and well-being in this environment?
- Which bodies can effectively participate in it, and for how long can they maintain their focused attention to the screen?
- What are the physiological, social, and psychological impacts of the new managements we now need to exercise in these meetings?

As Camila Alves shows us in her kindly recorded speech to accompany this material, **accessibility** can be thought of in a broader way, as a means of **creating connections and bonds in light of the contingencies of our bodily and behavioral multiplicities**. This, in fact, implies challenging the ableist logic that underpins our modes of organization in daily life. And for this, it is necessary for everyone involved to engage in the process. We need to discover ways of being and doing things together that consider multiple bodies and behaviors. We also need to be open to transforming and **expanding our own perceptual, cognitive, communicational, and bodily standards**.

[Watch
Camila's video
here:](#)

#Foralltosee: A horizontal black rectangular design frames a vertical colored rectangular image. In the foreground, a human figure painted in black with long hair and seen from behind, gazes at the colored rectangle. This rectangle contains other human figures with different disabilities displayed in green, blue, red, orange, and pink, overlapping each other, and so, forming a colorful background. To the left, there is a person in a wheelchair in red and another using crutches in green. In the center, a person with one arm in pink and purple, and to the right, someone with walking sticks in yellow, another in orange with round black sunglasses, and two blue hands performing sign language. End of description.



THE CULTURE OF ACCESS IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

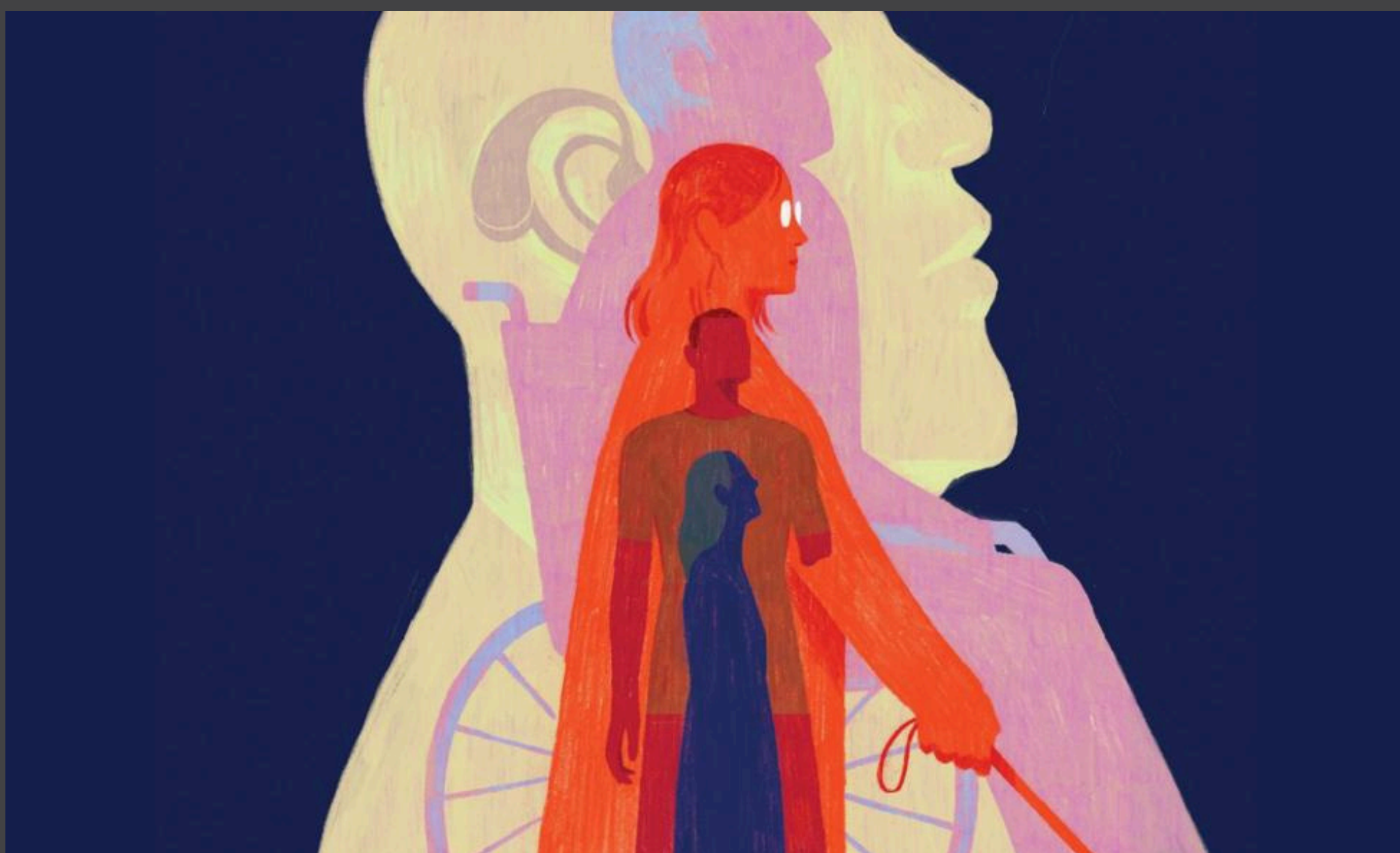
Regardless of the differences settled by each unique sensory, cognitive or physical condition, bodies with disabilities are discriminated against in different environments by the culture of normality that guides and regulates relationships. To change this, we need to **nurture an access culture in academic environments, whether in-person or virtual!** Find ways to create connections between people with different bodily conditions, in order to make the meeting happen effectively. When a person with a disability is in an environment with an already developed access culture, **interactions between people simply flow** – not because their differences are ignored, on the contrary, precisely because they are considered and embodied as part of the exchanges and relationships dynamics between people in that context. **Mediation** is, therefore, one of the most important devices in promoting accessibility:

“Mediation is about encounters, the expansion of knowledge; it means aligning with the repertoire and interests of others, connecting content and interests, going beyond content, bringing together, reflecting on and sharing experiences; it is dialogue, conversation, challenge. (...) Mediating is the act of transiting, articulating.” (Morales & Alves, 2019, p. 489)

[Watch Anahí Guedes's video here:](#)



A culture of accessibility views disability as otherness, a difference or uniqueness to be considered in any interaction, rather than a disability. This perspective is revolutionary because it **changes the way we relate symbolically and emotionally to the difference of disability** – it is not simply a damaged humanity, but another way of being human, and of existence – with its own abilities, and its own ways of being and doing, uncovering knowledge that those bodily constituted as “normal” are not always capable of developing, as they do not use their bodies in the same way.



Through the experience of engaging with multiple corporealities, all participants reinvent themselves, discovering ways of being together that are welcoming to the bodily diversities of disabilities. People who have already embraced **an ethos of accessibility** are open to **transforming and expanding their own standards** – perceptual, cognitive, communicative, and body standards – through their interactions with people with disabilities and their unique ways of being. We do not need to know everything about the specificities of one another! Accommodations arise from interactions. **We are all unique, and each experience is singular.** Legal frameworks and technical standards, although extremely necessary, will never be enough. What we need is a change in attitude, and **willingness to transform** and do things differently based on the relationship with others and the way differences are addressed and moved.

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Good practice guides on accessibility:

ABA - [Good practice guides on accessibility \(2017-2018 version\)](#)

Accessibility in virtual environments:

UFRN - [Emergency remote teaching: students with special educational needs](#)

Fiocruz - [Dialogues on accessibility, inclusion, and social distancing: existential territories in the pandemic.](#)

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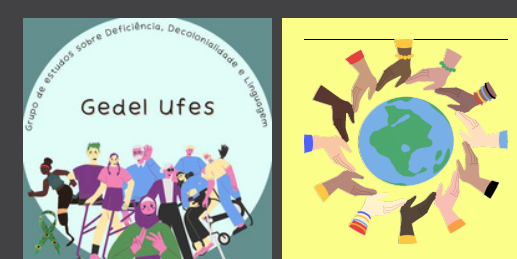
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