Aimi Hamraie. *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. 336 pp. $30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-5179-0164-6.

Reviewed by Shu Wan (University of Iowa)

In the past decade, the proliferation of academic works on the issue of accessibility within the field of disability studies has raised the awareness of historians of the significance of architecture and design for people with disabilities. Equal access to public facilities is now acknowledged as a basic human right and has provoked a controversy that has drawn historians' and sociologists' attention to recent scholarship on these issues. Beyond an intellectual history of "Universal Design" with restricted focus on architects, Aimi Hamraie's *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* not only chronicles the theoretical and practical foundation of Universal Design in twentieth-century American society, but also investigates its embodiments of different issues, including social movements and policy decisions. Consisting of seven chapters that discuss the theoretical evolution of Universal Design and its ramifications in the "real" world, Hamraie demonstrates the intersection between disability, gender, and race issues in the twentieth century.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine the intellectual history of two concepts in architecture and design: "normate template" and "flexible users." The two concepts respectively represent designers' and architects' employment of normal prototypes in their professions, and the responses of their opponents, who argue that they need to take individuals' requirements and differences into account in their design concepts. According to Hamraie, the "normate template" emerged in post-World War II America when the renowned American designer Henry Dreyfuss (1904-72) bridged "military and civilian applications of data with 'human engineering,' a new paradigm for creating products and tools by 'designing for people'" (p. 33). Following the formation of the "normate template" in the mid-twentieth century, American designers also took issues of flexibility into account that had been developed in the early twentieth century when "technologies of mass production relied on knowledge of users as a diverse range rather than an average" (p. 55). Prior to the emergence of Universal Design, the progress of the "flexible user" in theory and practice was very significant, which influences the main organizing thread of the chapters that follow.

In chapters 3 and 4, Hamraie discusses the embodiment of Universal Design in everyday practice in post-World War II American society and its interaction with other major political concerns of the period, such as disabled rights activists' rising consciousness of their basic human rights. In chapter 3, Hamraie historically situates the progress of the free barrier movement at the height of the civil rights movement. With the shared aim of ending segregation in public spheres, civil rights activists working to demolish barriers founded on racial difference collaborated with disability activists to break down the limitations and discrimination faced by both groups of "marginalized" people. In chapter 4, Hamraie examines the theory and practice of the curb-cutting movement. Taking knowledge-based logic into analysis of the interaction between disability and design history, Hamraie successfully demonstrates that concern with Universal Design shaped disability activists' struggle for spatial justice.

In the final three chapters, Hamraie returns to the

intellectual evolution of Universal Design in American society and in the design profession in the last three decades of the twentieth century. From the age of controversy concerning Section 504 in the mid-1970s to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, accessible design and facilities proliferated. As a result, "since the late 1990s, post-disability discourses have dominated the narrative of what counts as Universal Design" (p. 223).

Creating a set of innovative and provocative new terms including "normate template," "crip techno-science," and "epidemical activism" and utilizing them in analyzing the evolution of Universal Design in post-World War II American society, Hamraie integrates a materialist perspective into disability studies. As seen in Rosemarie Garland Thompson's commentary on the earlier edition of some chapters of this volume published in academic journals, Hamraie's coinage of the term "normate template" indicates a productive use of the term "normate" created in her classic work, *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997). Doubtless, Hamraie's approach to disability studies was profoundly affected by Garland Thompson's emphasis on the intersectionality between race, gender, and disability. Exemplified in the collaboration between the Black Panther Party and disabled sit-in protesters in the late 1960s, the missions of the two disadvantaged minority groups' struggles actually overlapped: ending segregated citizenship, and the pursuit of equal access to facilities.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

Citation: Shu Wan. Review of Hamraie, Aimi, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*. H-Disability, H-Net Reviews. May, 2019.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=54095