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Entry Title:

Routinings at the Water's Edge: Creative Access and Relational Method in Blue-Urban Fieldwork

Abstract:

Access in disability-informed fieldwork is not a static environmental feature nor a procedural guarantee. It emerges through creative, messy, uneven, and often invisible practices shaped by place, body, materiality, and relation. In this short communication, I introduce the concept of *routinings*: situated, affective, and more-than-human practices through which participation is enacted - and sometimes withdrawn - in blue space fieldwork with disabled people.

Drawing on creative relational methods and sensory-ethnographic encounters in tidal coastal environments with visually impaired participants, I explore micro-affordances such as co-timed immersion, dressing routines, and momentary refusals. These routinings are not background logistics; they are politically charged, emotionally saturated, and shaped by environmental volatility, institutional expectations, and embodied precarity. I conceptualise routinings as a creative methodological infrastructure - provisional and recursive, rather than fixed or replicable.

This contribution speaks to ongoing debates about how place mediates health equity, inclusion, and relational ethics. By centring the co-production of access in watery, affective, and atmospheric terms, I offer a framework for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to reimagine access not as a deliverable, but as an unfolding, accountable process: material, relational, and unfinished - a form of creative spatial negotiation that troubles the boundaries of urban geography and participatory research.

Keywords:

Disability and access; Urban blue space; Creative methodologies; Relational methods; Affective affordances; Feminist disability studies; Inclusive fieldwork

1. Introduction

Blue space research has demonstrated the potential of aquatic environments to support wellbeing through immersive, relational, and sensory encounters (Volker & Kistemann, 2011; Foley et al., 2019; Britton et al, 2020; White et al., 2020). Yet these benefits remain unevenly distributed (Bell et al., 2019). For many disabled people, participation in these environments is shaped not only by physical infrastructure but by institutional timeframes, environmental volatility, and assumptions of bodily

competence (Kafer &Terry, 2017; Heinemeyer & Berding, 2023). These can render access exhausting, uncertain, or impossible.

This communication offers a conceptual reframing of access in disability-informed fieldwork. Rather than treating access as a fixed condition or deliverable, I introduce the concept of *routinings*: the emergent, affective, and material practices through which participation is enacted in real time. These include co-timed immersion, sensory negotiation, shared dressing routines, or moments of pause and refusal, each shaped by human and more-than-human agencies (Barad, 2007; de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Drawing on fieldwork with visually impaired participants in watery environments, I conceptualise routinings as methodological infrastructure: micro-affordances through which inclusion is negotiated or denied. These practices are not inherently harmonious. They can be asymmetrical, emotionally charged, and shaped by histories of dependence, friction, and refusal (Mingus, 2011; Kafer, 2013; Goodley, 2024). To understand how place mediates health equity, we must attend to these fragile, relational processes - not as background logistics, but as the conditions that allow health-related participation to become possible, or impossible, in the first place.

2. From Routine to Rountinings: A Situated Theoretical Reframing

To speak of routine in disability research is to speak politically. What becomes stabilised as a "routine" is often a fragile choreography - an improvised entanglement of bodily coordination, environmental interference, institutional friction, and emotional exposure. Routines do not emerge in neutral space; they are shaped under conditions that privilege certain temporalities, bodily capacities, and ways of moving (Titchkosky, 2011; Kafer, 2013).

I use the term *routinings* to emphasise the provisional, negotiated, and politically saturated nature of these practices. They are not merely strategies disabled people employ to "get by," nor can they be reduced to accessibility checklists. Routinings unfold through the pause at a ramp's edge, the mutual recalibration of a wetsuit, the choice not to enter the water. These are not failures of planning but expressions of what Kafer describes as *crip time*: a refusal to conform to dominant rhythms, and a reorientation toward friction, mutuality, and interdependence (2013).

From an agential realist perspective, access is not the interaction of two autonomous bodies in a passive environment. As Barad (2007) argues, phenomena emerge through *intra-action* - the co-constitution of bodies, materials, atmospheres, and meaning. A moment of access may form through the grain of a ramp, the temperature of the air, a shared breath, or a misread gesture.

These affective-material entanglements are rarely smooth. Routinings are saturated with discomfort, vulnerability, and improvisation. They are ethical and epistemological events. Attending to them methodologically asks us not to catalogue what works, but to remain with the uncertainties that make participation possible (Shildrick, 2015; de la Bellacasa, 2017; Springgay & Truman, 2018). In blue space fieldwork, this means recognising that inclusion is not delivered by design - it is composed moment by moment, relationally and in place.

The following three vignettes illustrate how access unfolds in practice. Each reflects a routining: a relational, affective, and material moment where participation is improvised, withheld, or co-produced in place and time.

3.1 Vignette: Slipping the Pace

The ramp was slick with salt and algae, still wet from a recent storm surge. The wind was sharp, and the air carried the tang of seaweed and iron. I offered my arm, entering the familiar choreography of guiding - shared movement calibrated through breath, pressure, and pace. But this time, our rhythm misaligned. I stepped forward too assertively; she paused to orient. My stride became imposition, not support. The moment was brief, but unmistakably felt.

There was no apology, no correction, just a mutual recalibration. The ramp, the gusts, the hesitation, all co-performed the moment. It wasn't simply "out of sync"; it was a rupture in assumed competence. This was not failure, it was exposure. The asymmetry of interdependence surfaced: the emotional labour of guiding, the anticipatory work of trust, the silent negotiations of shared vulnerability.

Looking back, I understand this moment as a routining: an enactment of access shaped by atmospheric instability, institutional rhythm, and embodied memory. It disrupted normative expectations of fieldwork fluency and instead revealed what Mia Mingus describes as *access intimacy*: a situated, improvisational form of relational navigation.

Reinders (2017) reminds us that much of care resides in tacit gestures, not codified rules. This encounter lingered because access, here, was not delivered. It was hesitated into, held briefly, and co-produced under pressure.

Figure 1. Guiding in Motion: Recalibration, Embodied Trust, and the Slippery Choreographies of Access.

Participants move in shared formation along a coastal slipway, their synchronised yet uneven steps reflecting the affective and atmospheric work of relational navigation, where rhythm, gesture, and trust unfold moment by moment amid wet ground, shifting pace, and mutual attunement.

3.2 Vignette: Withdrawing from the Tide

The sky was low and the tide fast. We had planned a short coastal paddle. The route was familiar, the logistics rehearsed, and the timing matched to the tide's turn. But as we reached the shoreline, one participant - already changed, barefoot, paddle in hand - turned and said quietly, "Not today."

Her voice was steady, not apologetic. The layering of dressing, the cold, and a long morning's effort had become enough. She stood still while others moved forward. She wasn't undecided, she had decided. There was no resistance, just recalibration.

In that moment, access didn't collapse. It shifted. It dissolved gently into inaccessibility, a spacetime entanglement of salt wind, fatigue, shoreline textures, and bodily knowing. This was not a failure of readiness or resilience. It was a routining: a quiet refusal to align with institutional time, risk assessment logics, or the researcher's calendar.

Standing beside her, I felt a ripple of dissonance. Should I encourage her? Would this alter the data? That unease exposed how deeply I had internalised timelines not built for disabled rhythms. As Kafer reminds us, refusal is not absence - it is an assertion of crip time, of reimagined participation.

She didn't paddle that day. But when she returned the next week, I recognised her presence not as continuity, but as insistence on another rhythm. Sometimes, access is not entry but the agency to remain ashore.

Figure 2. "Not Today": Refusal, Readiness, and the Rhythms of Crip Time.

A participant pauses at the shoreline, enacting a quiet refusal that redefines access through agency, fatigue, and embodied timing

3.3 Vignette: Co-Dressing by the Shore

The water was sharp that morning, colder than usual. After a short swim, we returned to the slipway, dripping and breathless. The gulls echoed above, the rock reverberated with sound. We stood in the quiet, wetsuits clinging. She reached for her zipper, then hesitated. "Would you…?" she asked, gesturing behind her.

I moved carefully, attuned to touch, proximity, and salt-chilled skin. The wetsuit stuck at her hips. We adjusted. She laughed tightly, self-consciously. A moment later, she helped me with mine. The gesture was mirrored, but not equal. It didn't erase the asymmetry - it enacted it.

There was no manual for this kind of care. We weren't just removing neoprene; we were navigating modesty, fatigue, dignity, and discomfort on wet concrete, in public space. The routining here wasn't just the pull of a zipper, but decisions about where to look, how to hold silence, and when to step closer or away.

This was not efficient fieldwork. But it was fieldwork that mattered. It complicated autonomy and enacted what Reinders calls tacit knowledge: a mutual shaping of bodies through attention, timing, and trust. The choreography was both human and more-than-human - breeze, breath, material resistance.

Access, in that moment, was not a predetermined state. It emerged in the interdependence of the encounter: undone, remade, and made again, together.

Figure 2. "Getting Ready Together": Tacit Choreographies of Access.

Participants adjust wetsuits and prepare in quiet coordination, where shared gestures and small negotiations shape access as a co-produced, relational process.

4. Routinings as Methodological Infrastructure

Across the three vignettes, a pattern emerges: access is not delivered in advance, nor secured by standardised protocols. It unfolds as a fragile, improvised infrastructure, constituted through pauses, refusals, shared breath, tactile adjustments, and the recalibration of expectations. We call these *routinings*: emergent, embodied, and material-discursive practices through which participation becomes tentatively possible...and, at times, impossible.

As Barad (2017) reminds us, method is never outside the world it seeks to study; it is entangled with it, shaped through intra-actions that configure bodies, materials, meaning, and place. Routinings are not technical tools, nor are they errors. They are the phenomena of method itself, the atmospheric and material conditions through which research becomes liveable. The yield of neoprene, the tremor of hesitation, the sound of wetsuits on concrete: each is part of the method's architecture.

Kafer and Terry (2017) teach us that access is political because it is relational, non-linear, and always contested. Routinings enact this politics. They defy institutional logics of efficiency and competence, and expose the emotional and psychosocial labour of co-presence (Mingus, 2011; Reeve, 2013). They are not responses to breakdown - they are the ongoing, uneven work of sustaining relation.

Practically, this reframing demands more than reflective generosity. It calls for methodological humility: a willingness to be interrupted, misaligned, and reshaped. For institutions, it challenges funding frameworks to value not only measurable outputs, but the recursive labour of maintaining accessible relations (Titchkosky, 2011; de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Inclusion, in this light, is not an outcome guaranteed by design. It is a methodological capacity. One built and rebuilt through routinings that are affective, contingent, and spatially situated. To study health and participation through place, we must attend to the conditions that allow something – anything - to happen at all.

5. Conclusion: Holding Open the Work of Access

This paper has argued that access in disability-informed fieldwork is not a fixed endpoint, nor a deliverable guaranteed by design. It is an unfolding, contingent process, co-constituted through routinings that are material, relational, affective, and political. These practices do not reside in spatial audits or institutional protocols alone. They emerge through missteps, refusals, co-regulations, and improvisations, shaped by bodies, atmospheres, and temporalities.

To approach access in this way is to reframe inclusion not as accommodation, but as co-constitution. It calls on researchers to cultivate methodological humility, and on institutions to recognise that the labour of participation is not ancillary, but constitutive of the research encounter. This framing invites health geographers, disability scholars, and public health researchers to reconsider how method itself is shaped through who waits, who adapts, who refuses, and when.

Routinings do not simply support participation; they constitute the fragile infrastructure on which it becomes possible. They resist clean logics of outcome, disrupt assumptions of competence, and align with a crip epistemology that recognises knowledge as collaborative, recursive, and unfinished.

In blue space and beyond, we are not just making room for disabled participants. We are co-creating the shifting ground on which relation, accountability, and access unfold - tentatively, imperfectly, and together - so that something might happen at all.

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