

## ***“Disability Access and Global Technoscapes in Contemporary Russia”***

**A lecture by Cassandra Hartblay  
Professor at the University of Toronto**

**Wednesday, March 11, 2:00 – 4:00 PM  
Victoria College VC323**



A ramp at the entrance to a Moscow MacDonalds. A hard to verify rumor in a small Russian city that the new fleet of public buses will have access ramps. A well-known bank's holiday publicity campaign features accessible ATM interfaces. A surge in memes depicting inaccessible infrastructure. Since the advent of the concept of disability access in the 20th century, technologies promising to provide social and political inclusion for disabled people have been taken up and used in unexpected ways, often with little regard for the actual lived experience of disability. This talk explores examples of technologies designed for disability access as fetishized consumer objects, arguing that these objects and systems suggest a set of attributes that include modernity, convenience, ease, democracy, and future-facing possibility. Therefore, technologies of disability access may be mobilized to market technologies to nondisabled consumers who value these attributes. Drawing on critical disability studies, anthropology of technology and design, anthropology of globalization and capitalism, and the emerging STS subfield of Critical Access Studies, this talk situates unexpected appearances of disability access technology in contemporary Russia as part of a global supply chain in which technoscapes take on particular local meanings.

Cassandra Hartblay is Assistant Professor of Health Humanities in the Interdisciplinary Centre for Health and Society and the Department of Anthropology at UTSC, where she is also involved in the creation of a new disability studies centre. She is UofT graduate faculty in the Department of Anthropology, and affiliated with the Centre for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. She joined the faculty in 2018 after postdoctoral appointments at Yale University and the University of California San Diego. She received her PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2015. Her research is focused on the moral and cultural dimensions of disability as social difference. Dr. Hartblay's ethnographic manuscript, *Totally Normal*, explores Russian postsocialism as a local vantage point from which to imagine disability as social difference, and traces the ways that technologies and designs for disability access take on different meanings across global contexts. This work is informed by critical medical anthropology and queer feminist disability studies. Along with critical ethnographic texts, Dr. Hartblay works in multimedia forms. Her play, *I WAS NEVER ALONE*, based on life history interviews with adults with visible disabilities in the first post-Soviet generation in Russia, has been performed at UCSD, UNC-CH, and Yale University, and is slated for publication with University of Toronto Press.