

1981 IYDP STAMPS



UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DISABLED PEOPLE
1981 GLOBAL STAMP ISSUES

Collected and Edited by Paul Darke

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Front Cover: 1981 IYDP Tunisia SG 985 (Tree with Broken Branch)
Rear Cover: Reverse of Front Cover Image (glue on back of stamp)

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PREFACE

The study of the 'Representation of Disability' is increasingly common in relation to cinema, literature, television, and other areas of cultural production. This is the first look at Disability and the humble postage stamp. I have written extensively about Disability Theory and Cinema for thirty years: I have collected postage stamps of disability and impairment for twenty years. It was only a matter of time before I would combine the two interests. The Covid-19 Pandemic finally provided the opportunity, and the funding, to start the process of creating a relevant publication.

I have put together this collection, with a few relevant essays, of a single year's Disability-themed stamp issues, as a starting point for further adventures in philately and Disability. There is a wealth of material from a century's worth of global postage stamps to explore and, I hope, you will stick with me for the journey. In future, I hope to do individual books on the Wheelchair and Crutches and then on various impairments such as Deafness, Visual Impairment and Amputation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In putting together a publication, it is necessary to acknowledge and thank many people without whom it would not have been possible to have achieved what you now have in front of you. Firstly, the UN for issuing stamps. Equally, without the support of Unlimited, Abby Hoffman and Jo Verrent in particular, this publication would not have taken shape. I would also like to thank the contributors: Nigel Smith, Professor Simon McKeown of Teesside University, Miro Griffiths of Leeds University, and the legend that is Dr Alison Wilde. Finally, I would like in particular to acknowledge Outside Centre (Digital Disability) and its key trustees and personnel Claire Darke, Tony Young, Liz Carr and Walker Darke, without whom nothing would have even started. Finally, thanks must also go to Paddy Long for her support in helping make this the best it can be. As is always the case: all errors are solely due to me.

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GLOSSARY

UN IYDP: The United Nations (UN) designates specific days, weeks, years and decades as occasions to mark particular events or topics to promote, raise awareness of and take action supporting the objectives of the organization. Member States propose 'observances' and the General Assembly of the UN establishes them with a resolution. 1976 saw the passing of the resolution of the Declaration of the Rights of Disabled People; a further proclamation designated 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) with the theme 'full participation'. The UN also has its own Postal Administration, which issues from its primary offices in the USA, Austria and Switzerland stamps that disseminate the work of the Organisation.

SG: The primary cataloguing system of global stamp issues in the UK has, since 1865, been carried out by Stanley Gibbons. Each stamp is classified by its issuing authority (i.e., country) and given a number: in the UK, their 'SG' number. Catalogues are produced to facilitate identification and values. Other countries have their own stamp numbering systems: Germany has Michel (1910); the USA has Scott (1868), and France has Yvert et Tellier (1895).

MS / Minisheets: a 'Minisheet', abbreviated as 'MS', is a decorative or illustrative design around a single item or number of stamps as part of a specific stamp issue. An MS has an inset of one, or multiple, perforated stamp(s) of a specific stamp issue, or (a) unique stamp(s) complementing an ordinary stamp issue. Minisheets vary in size depending upon the number of stamps each contains.

Cinderella: a Cinderella stamp closely resembles a regular postage stamp yet was not, however, issued by an official government postal administration, for example, the Hutt River Province issue of 1981 herein.

INTRODUCTION

For the sake of clarity, we have written this book within the social model of disability: disability is a political construct external to the body. Impairment is the pathological reality of the body, the impaired body. We, those with impaired bodies, are thus 'disabled people'; we are disabled through our experience of the social processes and constructions that marginalise, discriminate against, and negate us. Consequently, there can be, within the social model, no such thing as 'people with disabilities' as disablement is a coherent social process affecting people with impairments.

In 1981, the UN International Year of Disabled People (IYDP) meant a free boat ride on the Serpentine in London. This was the first I had heard of IYDP, as a working-class young man who grew up on a Council Estate in Surrey (UK). The idea that IYDP existed, let alone that it was celebrated on stamps, was lost on me. As was stamp collecting *per se*: philately was something the old, the middle-class, people did to live in the past. It took a further twenty years before I took any notice – even though I did a PhD in disability representation (in cinema) in the interim.

My PhD on disability and cinema should have taught me something about collecting – which was not to start another one. Creating a collection of any sort takes over any rational thought. When studying I started to collect

films that depicted disability: I initially believed there would be few, as 'disabled people are culturally invisible'. I thought the same when I started as a thematic collector, to collect stamps showing disability, or rather impairments. I was wrong about such films (there are thousands) and I was wrong about stamps with impairments (there are thousands)! It is the price one pays, both figuratively and economically, for being a collector.

I think it was Pierre Bourdieu, the great French philosopher, who wrote that a collector is collecting themselves. I was, I am, perhaps attempting to give myself meaning in a commodified, reified, society where the value of disabled people is never more than less. Collecting stamps of impairment and disability is, in some Jungian world, an attempt at creating a valid persona in order not to be a mere archetype as 'disability as impairment' most commonly is in cultural representations of disability. Collecting is, perhaps, a futile passion in the face of mass cultural negation and the recognition of the existential pointlessness of it all; stamp collecting - the passion for the image that will liberate, potentially finding an image or artefact that is of complete social significance - is what gives me the hope to continue collecting and, one day, find that perfect stamp (some come close) that gives me, disabled people, meaning in a usually oppressive world. That is surely the goal of all collectors, whatever they collect; we are attempting completion as a form of perfection for true meaning and worth. The perfect collection, for the collector,



is, after all, a thing of extreme beauty however ugly or worthless others deem the collection.

For me, this collection is about giving myself and disabled people a value, a significant degree of social capital, if you will. It is not necessarily a positive value but it is one that I could feel was real, one that is indicative of reality rather than illusion. Stamp collecting is a socially acceptable 'hobby', a 'normal' activity; in collecting within the theme of 'disability' I was developing a strategy to validate myself as 'normal'. Of course, I now realise that 'normal' is an illusion. In fact, the more negative a stamp (or impairment representation) of disability is often more enjoyable; more pleasurable. If life is experienced as a negative social construct (disability as social process of exclusion and discrimination) then the things, those cultural artefacts that come out of the

reality of society, may reveal this indirectly, unintentionally. Such representations can give the greatest joy as one would respond to them – however subconsciously – with a sense of: ‘yes, that is how it is, and it is not me’. A ‘disability stamp’, one that displays any degree of political insight, as do the UN IYDP 1981 stamps, is a pure joy; they are a rare call for change, for justice, for inclusion. They may not always succeed, nor have that intent, yet they constitute an attempt with clout and impetus. Equally, until the arrival of the Paralympics, and their obsession with the normalisation of impairment, the UN IYDP 1981 stamps were the most to feature impairment and disability in any single year. The UN IYD 1981 stamps, their global issues, to some extent enabled the rise and the power of the Paralympics (be that for good or bad – another book in itself).

I have a passion for the stamps as they reveal the reality of disablement in the past and the present through their primary focus on impairment. Whether or not such a reality is revealed intentionally or unintentionally does not matter as I am the master of my own interpretation, just as you are. I am happy that these stamps, and all the other thousands in my collection, will one day be ‘seen’ and ‘noticed’, as such a feeling is not there for most people with stamps. Stamps are all around us, they are invisible yet everywhere, yet we barely notice them and usually toss them in the bin as waste. That reminds me of something ...

The era in which I have lived is, perhaps, the only era that I could have lived. This is the only era in which I could have survived and thrived: before I was born, children did not survive, whilst ten years after I was born society through medical progress identified ways to screen people like me out of existence. Such is the reality of someone with Spina Bifida (and hydrocephalus). So, in this brief time, I want to assemble the symbols of existence, my existence, in order to feel real: I want to create for posterity the fact that I, we, are and were here. Thus, films and stamps about impairment (and, to a lesser degree, disability), more specifically being in a wheelchair, are indicators for disabled people, impaired people, that we exist and have some value - even if that value is 22 cents, 67 pence or 2 pesos, whatever amount.

Disabled people are to be celebrated: we are the biodiversity of humanity. Possibly, a commemoration is tokenistic, or mere propaganda by those issuing the stamps. To me, to us, they are more than this because they make me more. Intent is not an issue for me, as are most cultural artefacts; intent may be a creators' aim, yet the consumer has control over its reception.

Increasing numbers of countries are beginning to stop printing stamps and are moving towards digital or postal service liberalisation (privatisation). As 'stamps' disappear, so too disabled people, as am I, are beginning to disappear due to medical



advancement: both scenarios are indicative of a great loss to humanity.

Many stamps do not depict disablement: they do not explore the processes of discrimination or exclusion. Most stamps in the thematic stamp collection of disability depict impairment i.e., the pathologies of difference or the limitations of the impaired body. The UN IYDP 1981 stamps are different: they were intended to challenge disablement and legitimise impairment by acting as a catalyst for political change for the advancement of all in society (as is the case with most UN 'Year of' stamps). They are overtly political. Many UN IYDP 1981 stamps do this: they demonstrate, or call for, the social changes that can be made to achieve inclusion, to a greater or lesser degree (mechanical, political, and social). Most stamps, outside of the UN IYDP 1981 stamps, almost exclusively fall back on a Charity Model of disability - disabled



UNITED NATIONS VIENNA SG V18-19

people as objects of an impairment failing to be helped to be as 'normal' as possible – or are purely a 'normalising' ideology. Such 'charity' or 'normalising' stamps indicate no real attempt at notions of equality or justice. Normality, the greatest delusion of all societies, is at the heart of most stamp issue representations of impairment/disability. This is occasionally true, to some extent of the UN IYDP 1981 stamps, those see the challenge to disablement as being 'normalisation of impairment'. I would argue we need to value impairment, or difference, as equal, not erase it; the challenge is not to assimilate but to validate as equal those with impairments.

In 1981 Disability politics was quite new as a civil rights issue, or a progressive political issue globally, even if it started in the 1960s in the UK: thus, the UN IYDP 1981 stamps, however political, are rooted in an accepted illusion of 'normality'. As such, they reflect

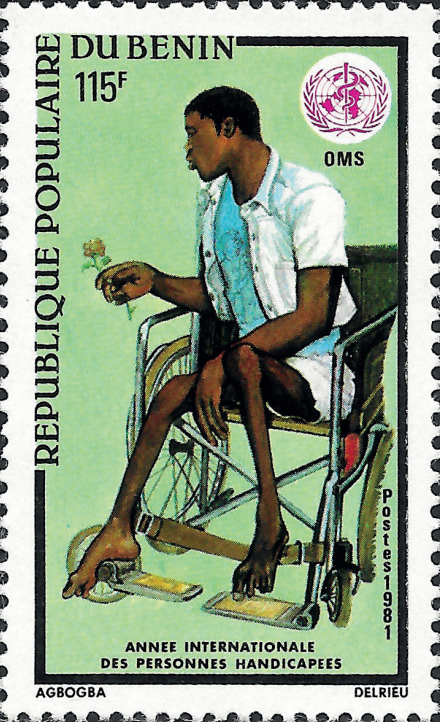
society's almost universal cultural adoption of the fantasy 'normality' as real. Consequently, one cannot criticise a stamp for not breaking the boundaries of society in the very conventional cultural practice of postage stamp production which is largely controlled by men.

Am I collecting myself? Of course I am! The stamps of disability (UN IYDP 1981 or not) indicate the confused political state of the definition of disability: as such, it is an accurate reflection of society and the place and role of disabled people in society as a political, economic, and lived reality. The contributions from Nigel Smith, Dr Alison Wilde, Dr Miro Griffiths and Professor Simon McKeown, all experts in disability and culture, or critical cultural theory, will it is hoped give you further 'disability' perspectives on the UN IYDP 1981 stamps that you can carry forward in your own interest in disability, philately, and life.

Every issue of the UN IYDP 1981 stamps is shown in this book. You can see hundreds of other stamps depicting disability throughout postal history on the website www.digital-disability.com; it is still a work in progress that will one day be complete. I live in hope that upon the 50th Anniversary, in 2031, of the UN IYDP 1981 issues, a similar global issue will take place to show what changes have taken place in disabled peoples' lives since 1981. Obviously, my dream is that one might include me: perhaps then I may realise I am real and do have value - as do all disabled people.



ARGENTINA SG 1717



BENIN SG 827



AUSTRALIA SG 827



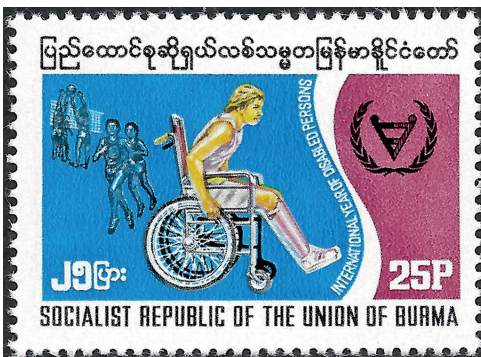
BAHAMAS SG 578-79 ON MS580



BAHRAIN SG 279-80



BOPHUTHATSWANA SG 68-71



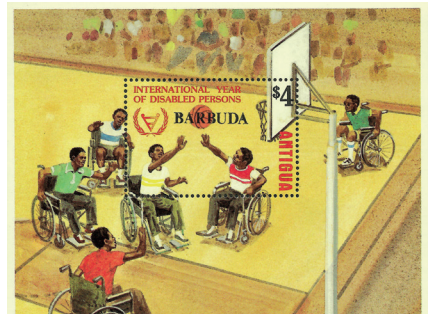
BURMA SG 295



BARBUDA SG 576-9



BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS SG 470-3



**BARBUDA MS 607 & SG 603-6
[BARBUDA OVERPRINT]**

MIRO GRIFFITHS

Stamps commissioned for the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons provide insight into how disability is positioned within existing political, economic, cultural, and social arrangements. It presents imagery of disability representation at that particular point (1981), while it gives way to the alternative, perhaps preferable, visions of how disabled people will participate and contribute in their respective communities. There is the additional layer of viewing the stamps now, in the present, and reflecting on how disabled people experience and navigate the marginalisation and oppression assembled through contemporary ideas, practices, and policies.

The stamps, provide a platform on which to present, communicate, and display a plurality of meanings. Emphasis should be placed on the various levels of interpretation opened through engagement with the stamps. What stories, issues, and points are conveyed through the design, production, and dissemination of the artefacts? Our reading of the stamps can - and should - reflect on the ideas and decisions of artists, curators, and commissioners who have an integral role in the creation of the stamps. In viewing the collection, one must account for the broader cultural and social contexts that surround the imagery, their significance,

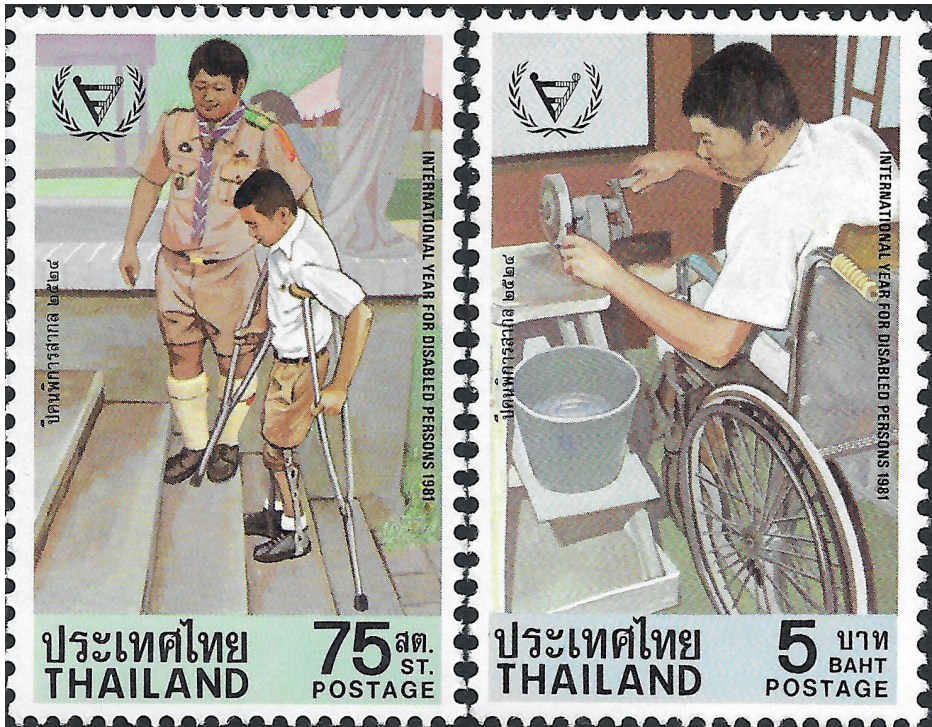


and the contribution they make to disabled people's position within society. We need to consider the subjectivity of the audience as well as the stamp's curator; we must critique the existing imagery and also consider who and what is excluded from the print; furthermore, we can reflect on whether the stamps manipulate our understanding of disabled people's participation within society.

It is impossible to provide a comprehensive critique of the stamp images herein instead, when reflecting the images and their entanglement with international and celebratory days/years, I present three key themes for consideration: 1) impairment and functionality gaze; 2) understanding contribution, and 3) the aesthetics of marginalisation.

The first theme describes the effort to concentrate gaze upon impairment and human functioning. The stamps become an examination of an individual's perceived difference, and the curiosity that unfolds when disabled people manoeuvre or operate parts of the body. Take, for example, the Bangladesh stamp of an individual sitting at a desk and writing with a pen. Their arms – which for the ableists amongst us would be categorised as deformed and inferior – are presented front centre of the stamp. The individual's face is blurred and nondescript, but their upper limbs are carefully detailed and show the curvature and scarring of the skin. Similarly, the Thailand stamp of an individual climbing stairs with the support of callipers, crutches, and – I assume – personal assistance. Our gaze is orientated towards aspects of the body, and of the technologies disabled people employ to mobilise and navigate surroundings. This promotes a context of difference and othering. Disabled people are interesting because of their functional capacity and their deviation from the assumed norm.

It could be suggested that I have thus far ignored the importance of disabled people's participating in the community – perhaps the images are to celebrate disabled people's contribution to knowledge and discourse (through writing) or disabled people navigating unnecessary barriers (staircases). My point, here, is to question what is gained when audiences focus upon the presumed



THAILAND SG 603-4

differences of the disabled people's community, and particularly so when these differences are located within our bodies. The purpose of emancipatory politics and social action is to address the arrangements within society and to challenge the unnecessary barriers imposed upon a community. This is not achieved through gazing upon impairment; instead, it is through challenging the toxicity of normality and idolised functioning. I'm not suggesting that impairment be rendered

invisible, hidden, or dismissed. Rather, I am suggesting that the route to emancipation is through acknowledgement of functional diversity and valuing variation within human existence. Impairment and conditions are not deviations from the norm, but are a reflection of how beings are changing constantly – they are in a state of becoming.

The second theme builds upon the idea of gaze yet is focused on how contributions are appraised and valued. Often, disabled people's participation within society is judged upon the worth and cost of their contributions. This has led to the historical and contemporary practice of institutionalisation, segregation, and restricted access to the social world. There lies a danger in focusing primarily on disabled people's contributions to the existing arrangements within society. The route to participation leads our community towards accepting and reproducing the normative values, ideas, and practices that produce society. Take the Icelandic stamp, jigsaw pieces of human beings with one empty space. The jigsaw – society – is displayed as incomplete, as a single piece – the disabled people's community – is not included. The collective is perceived to lack the contribution of disabled persons.

One cannot ignore the irony when eugenicist policies are widespread within Iceland (as they are across countries in the minority world). Thus, certain contributions are deemed valuable and worthy of building



ICELAND SG 601

participatory and accessible mechanisms to include disabled people. Others are left to be screened out, institutionalised, and subjected to punitive actions. Valuable contributions can be understood as those that do not destabilise or radically challenge the existing political, economic, cultural, and social arrangements within society but make something better. The Guernsey stamp can be an example of this – a person using a



GUERNSEY SG 245-8

manual wheelchair, sitting on the edge of a swimming pool, readying to jump into the water and compete. The acceptance of their contribution comes through the triumph over adversity. The barriers experienced may or may not be addressed, but the individual's perseverance and self-sufficiency remain the focus. It is this notion of contribution that is unsettling because it fails to capture the assemblage of material and discursive factors that reproduce experiences of barriers, discrimination, and oppression. Disabled activists and disabled people's social

movements have resisted this by destabilising normative ideas of capacity and capability. Attention should be placed on thinking through what, we as disabled people, can do when we disrupt the existing material and discursive parameters that have resulted in our current state of marginalisation.

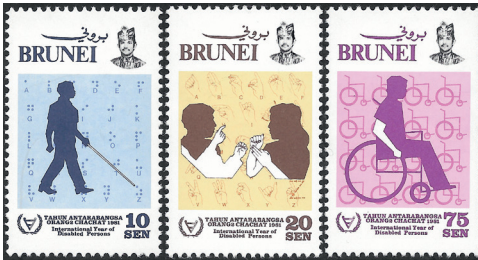
The final theme, which I have termed the aesthetics of marginalisation, refers to the way disabled people's position within society is beautified through such images. This point transcends the stamp collection and can be identified through the repeated "celebrations" of disabled people, often by national and supranational entities who proclaim international years and days dedicated to specific communities and groups. There are cycles of activity, as organisations and politicians engage in a frenetic pace of delivering events and statements in acknowledgement of the disabled people's community; only for it to end in a matter of days with a return to hostile policies, inaccessible environments, and an embracing of ableist tendencies. Here, I am asking what happens to our reflections, and responses when we are confronted by aestheticised images of barriers and restrictions. The images of disabled people participating in specific environments, the symbols employed to showcase the importance of the disabled people's community, and the colours used to attract attention are not reflective of the current position encountered by the

majority of disabled people. Is there a danger that such artefacts, and celebratory events, instigate complacency or distract from the demands and activities of disabled activists and their organisations? Our community has struggled and continues to struggle against the onslaught of oppressive political and economic objectives and a continuum of slow violence. Many within the disabled people's community are not politicised, and do not describe their experiences in terms of unnecessary barriers and restricted opportunities.

I'm not convinced that these images, and celebratory days/years, will help to realise emancipation and bring about opportunities for disabled people to participate in inclusive and accessible environments. Nevertheless, they remain important. They capture a moment in time that provides us with avenues of critique, reflection, and debate. We need to consider these images alongside the concepts and theories we employ to describe, explain, and understand disability. These artefacts are essential for understanding and debating the historical, contemporary, and future position of disabled people within society. It provides an opportunity to contest understandings of disability, of social organisation, and terms we often employ: accessibility, justice, inclusion, and participation.

I welcome the opportunity to read your interpretation of the images.

1981 IYDP STAMPS DIGITAL DISABILITY



BRUNEI SG 309-11

CONGO SG 814-5

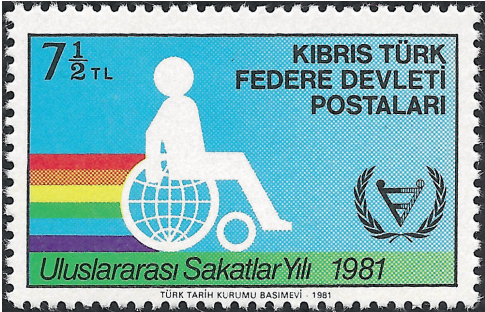


CAPE VERDI ISLANDS SG 511

CHINA SG 891



EGYPT SG 1460



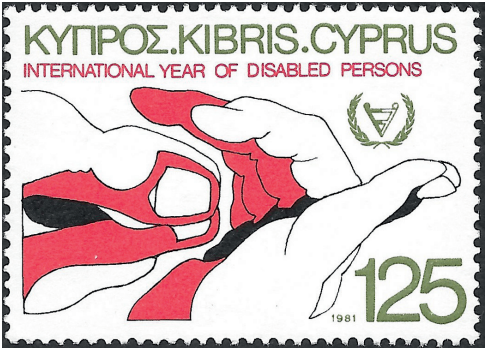
TURKISH CYPRIOT POSTS SG 117



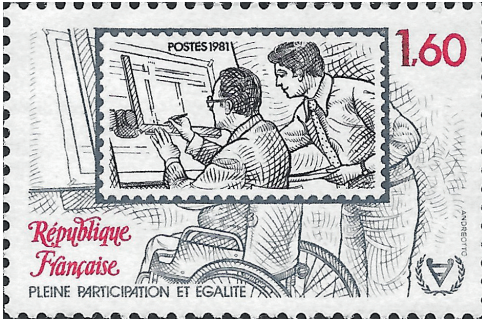
CZECHOSLOVAKIA SG 2556



FIJI SG 608-11



CYPRUS SG 578



FRANCE SG 2285



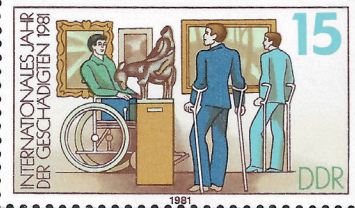
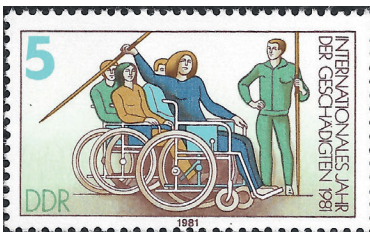
GERMANY WEST SG 1947



INDIA SG 1003



GUYANA SG 857-60



GERMANY EAST SG E2334-5



ITALY SG 1706



HONDURAS SG 1016



IRAQ SG 1501-3



LAOS SG 509-11



JAMAICA SG 521-4



KUWAIT SG 884-5

ALISON WILDE

Stamps present significant visual representations of contemporary national cultures, yet they remain overlooked in the field of visual culture. This is especially true of this collection of stamps, from the UN International Year of Disabled People (IYDP) 1981 – there has been little analysis of how disability issues and disabled people are portrayed on stamps. With 1981 being marked as an ‘international year’, this category of stamps tells us that we might anticipate many representations which communicate global themes common to all disabled people. Disabled people involved in the disabled people’s movement might also expect to see imagery which signifies the growing politicisation of disablement, reflecting the commitment to ‘full participation and equality’ (UN, 2020, para 2). Moreover, we might reasonably expect IYDP’s goals to improve ‘public awareness’, to change social attitudes, and to promote the development of disabled people’s organisations (UN, 2020, para 3) to be primary dimension of representation. Certainly, there are elements of these features here, although the commitment to participation and equality is opaque and the promotion of disabled people’s organisations is absent. That said, these IYDP stamps are perhaps best seen as the beginning of a worldwide recognition that disabled people have cultural value and deserve ‘equal rights’.

Stamps are one of the few official visual signifiers of national cultural identity, so it is understandable that the few social sciences/humanities researchers who have studied stamps have recognised the value of using stamps to analyse aspects of national identity (e.g., Deans, 2005), and to look into the culture of political regimes (such as the Third Reich, Lauritzen. 1988). Research has also been conducted into representations of science (Yardley, 2015) and the use of stamps as pedagogic tool to teach Social Studies (Kirman and Jackson, 2000). There are a number of other research studies into stamps, but most of these are technology-based rather than sociology - or art-based explorations, such as Oliveira's (*et al*) chemistry-based exploration of colours used in stamps. With little else to guide us on the representation of disabled people on stamps, this is where my discussion of the IYPD collection begins: with colour. As a major facet of visual culture and symbolism, analysing colour provides a valuable way of understanding the semiotics of postage stamps, even if it is only one of the many ways we could approach this collection. An important caveat here is that I have not considered the ways in which technology and national economic considerations may have affected colour choices, a task which would involve a considerable amount of research across many countries.

Despite the diversity of colours across this range of stamps, perhaps reflecting the wide variety of cultural sensibilities and norms

of the countries in which they originated, my initial impression was that there was a preponderance of blue in the background or detail of the images portrayed. The symbolism of blue varies wildly within cultures denoting many things including joy, the sublime, spirituality melancholy, death, health, freedom and austerity (e.g., Coates, 2010). As Coates has argued regarding colour in cinema, blue (as do most colours) 'oscillates between joy and depression', and is inextricably tied to its 'function within any signifying system' (3). As the context here is a) postage stamps, b) national cultures and c) the international promotion of disabled people's rights, the colour blue seems to sit somewhat ambiguously between the pre- and post-1981 eras, from relatively unenlightened times to increased global recognition of disability discrimination; in many cases it suggests, perhaps, an anchoring in older medical understandings of disability, e.g. the blues often associated with medical uniforms.

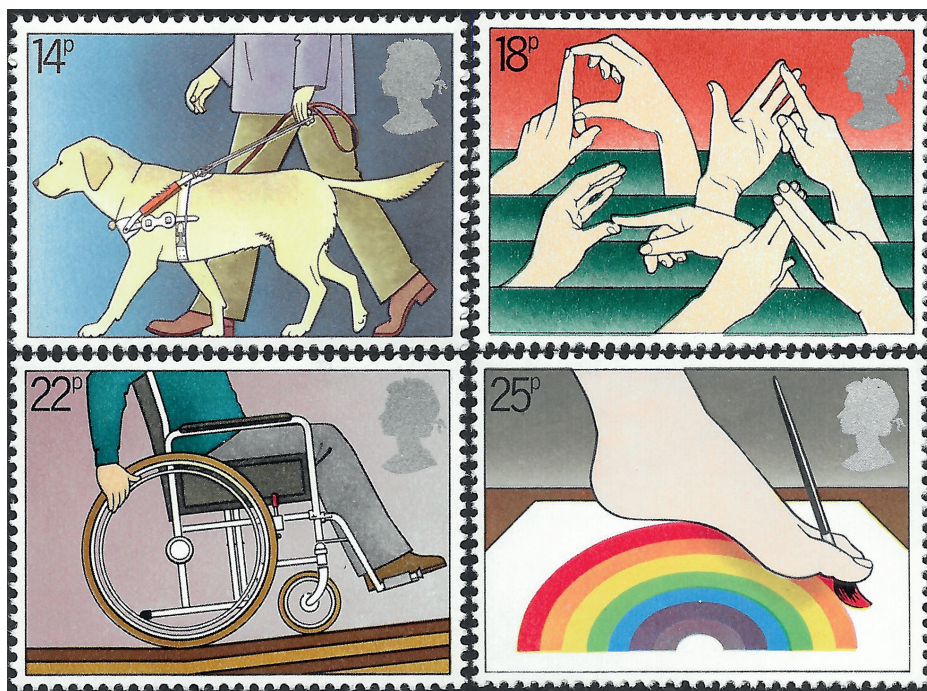
The uses of blue, and colours such as green and yellow, tend to be of low saturation, using pastel shades. Many of these are mixed (hybrid) colours such as pale turquoise and cyan. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) have associated the use of pastel hybrid colours as a key signifier of the 'ideologies of postmodernism', where 'hybridity is positively valued' (256). This might signify the message that the move towards disabled people's rights is one towards a post-disablement future, away from the disabling structures of



modernism, but the paleness of many of these stamps also implies a taciturn approach. As Kress and Leeuwen suggest, low saturation often suggests a position of neutrality or coolness towards a topic. The production of the stamps suggests a tacit approval of IYDP, yet these pastel palettes seem to indicate a weak commitment - there is also very little differentiation in the composition of many of these stamps, suggesting a timidity to speak out too much about the ostensibly radical principles of IYDP. Key examples here are the blue El Salvador stamp, with an oddly religious-looking image, a single eye and hands hovering like angel's wings, above a book in braille. The pale blue hues of the background, the eye and the book almost merge into one another, with differentiation coming only from the yellow hands and purple braille dots.

The reluctance of many countries to use

bold saturated colours might be seen as understandable in a year which was quite early in the development of the global disabled people's movement, with many countries understanding the need to commit to action whilst remaining uncertain of the consequences of such a commitment. It is possible that many therefore chose to avoid being 'freighted with the heavy burden of ideology' associated with 'pure' saturated colours (Gage, 1999: 107, cited in Kress and Leeuwen, 2002, 356). However, there are exceptions to the use of pale, hybrid colours. One clear example is that of the stamps of Great Britain (GB); indeed, although there are varying levels of saturation, here these images use more highly saturated, differentiated (and often 'pure', as opposed to hybrid) colours. One stamp depicts only the leg of a person who is painting a large rainbow with their toes. Painting with the foot, or mouth, was a common trope - one might even be forgiven for thinking this is a primary occupation for most disabled people across the globe, given the frequency of these portrayals. Across these four stamps from GB, we can see that an effort has been made to address the needs of disabled people for adaptations, individual impairments (they feature BSL, an assistance dog, a wheelchair user and the aforementioned leg) and some of the solutions (e.g., ramps, assistance, and appropriate communication). Overall, these particular stamps convey a range of issues that position disabled people as people who have both unmet needs which can easily be



GREAT BRITAIN SG 1147-50

met, while also highlighting the productive potential of disabled people: two feature what appear to be (headless) men wearing work clothes and with the rainbow stamp (literally) illustrating the creativity of disabled people (assuming this is a disabled person).

As are most other countries' stamps, these are all illustrations, none of which features a face; this is a significant omission. Very few of the stamps in the whole collection feature actual disabled people. Indeed, the only photographs



of real people we see are those of Prince Charles and Princess Diana (i.e., Aitutaki, Cook Islands), both non-disabled; there are other famous disabled people depicted through illustration, notably Franklin D. Roosevelt, Beethoven, Sarah Bernhardt, Helen Keller, Louis Braille, Cervantes, Degas, Renoir, and Homer). There are also photographs of non-celebrities on the stamps from the Antillen (Netherlands) and Malaysia, and a series from Barbados with people in various situations: a young woman communicating in sign language, a 'blind' girl 'at work' at a Brailier, a group crossing the road with canes,



NETHERLANDS ANTILLES SG 747- 50

asking the reader to 'be alert to white canes'. The Barbadian stamps are also noteworthy in their use of 'purer' colours; with little use of pastel colours, deep red, greens, browns, yellows and mid-blue dominate, perhaps suggesting a firmer commitment to disabled people's rights alongside the greater visibility of disabled people in the public domain.

Other countries that stick to a more saturated 'pure' palette are those of Tonga, where red dominates one (there are a few variations, all framed in bold, pure colours), providing





a more arresting appearance. However, there is no message here about disability about from the message that 'Tonga Red Cross honours IYPD'; as such, this is the only stamp which devolves the country's association with disability to a single organisation, rather than portraying the commitment of the country itself. Whilst every country needs to be seen in the light of its developing cultural context, and the degrees of awareness, understanding and commitments each might make, it is notable that this is specifically tied to an organisation whose mission is to alleviate suffering, rather than one agitating for

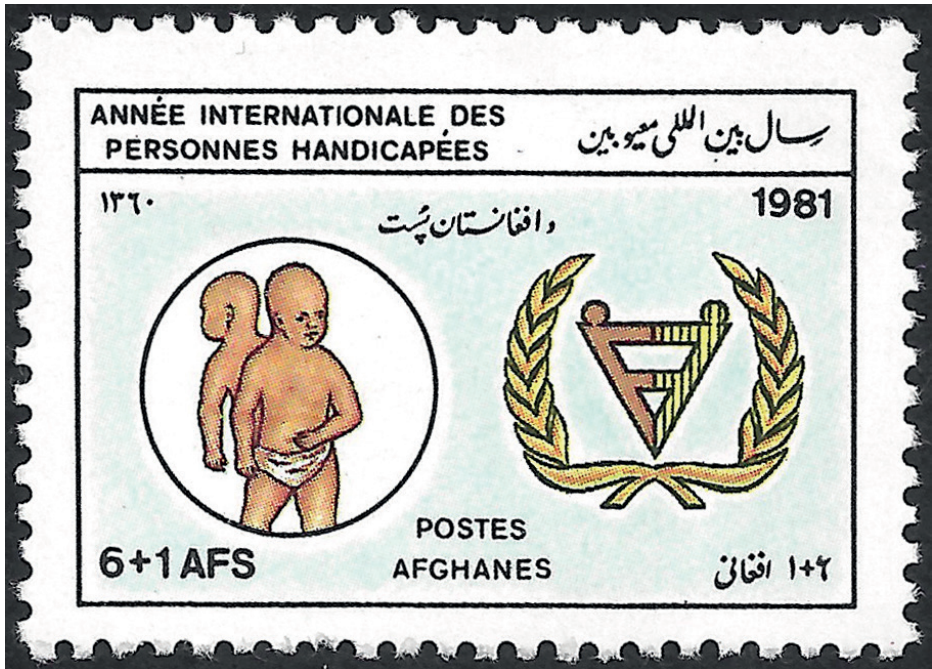


CHINA TAIWAN SG 3145-6

the promotion of rights. Sadly, nearly four decades later, we can see that this leaning towards a tragedy model is traceable in recent statistics and approaches towards disability, with disabled people still facing severe forms of marginalisation (Tonga Statistics Department, 2019).

A bold use of red also appears on several other stamps, often with orange and emblems of fire (e.g., candles); this can be found in the Republic of China's stamp, portraying an image of a candle, and several

mini-depictions of red disabled figures on white backgrounds - these look almost like playing cards. Illustrating the necessity to understand national cultural contexts, it is prudent to acknowledge the auspicious meanings associated with red in China, often used as joyous colour. Still, even in Chinese culture, red is like other colours in that its signifying value is diverse (anger, danger, love, and so on) and dependent on context. Toulson (2013) acknowledges the mutability of the colour in Chinese culture. In her anthropological study of red envelopes at Singaporean Chinese funerals, she finds the 'positive' meanings of red (e.g., fertility and joy) in Chinese culture to be far more complex than merely an association with happy events and feelings. In the case of these funerals she shows how red is used to signify differences in social power, the 'taking on of pollution' (160) - in this case death, to communicate ideas of protection, and as a marker of 'obligation made clear'. She even suggests that red is used as a protective act, to bribe the gods to spare them from pollution. This demarcation of the spiritual from the mundane through the use of red may have been at play here, particularly as the stamp includes a portrayal of conjoined twins (as only one of two in this collection; the other is Afghan), given that such twins tend to be used as a 'spectacular' impairment in cultural imagery (often denoting abnormality), rarely depicted outside sensationalist contexts (Wilde 2018). Together these



AFGHANISTAN SG 873

might lead us to an interpretation of disabled people as a pollutant, especially given the (crudely drawn) disabled figures used. Moreover, there is an additional suggestion that a spiritual and death-related approach is being taken towards disabled people, as the image of a single candle is associated with several religions, such as Christianity and Hinduism, and is often associated with death and dying (Johnson and Wijdicks, 2018), a connotation most disabled people would hate. The use of red on the figures here might also denote spiritual passion. Given the

religiosity of the candle, once again we could perhaps assume that we should pray for disabled people, and that pity should be felt for the 'cards they are dealt'. However, there is also a second stamp that is almost exactly the same, but with the same figures in green matching the colour of the stamp's price tag – I can only assume this was a design-based decision to use complementary colours for a clear differentiation between the higher and low prices.

Algeria also used saturated colours, portraying a flower being given to two silhouettes of disabled people with mobility-related impairments, bound together on a





TURKEY SG 2723-4



FINLAND SG 1207



CAMEROON SG 897-8



DOMINICAN REP. SG 1447-8

swirling rainbow of vibrant yellow, orange, and pink, on a purple background. So, despite a powerful, eye catching image we have a potentially patronising image of a (presumably) non-disabled hand sending flowers to 'the disabled'; flowers were a common theme amongst the stamps as a whole, invariably with no clear reason for their presence.

Turkey and Finland also feature uses of strong colours, especially yellow, with the first featuring the ubiquitous wheelchair logo, and the latter using an abstract design of a face, with no clear message emerging from

either. Others with brighter colours include Cameroon's depiction of a girl with walking aids, in a bright red dress, with an inexplicably angry look on her face and the Dominican Republic which uses five disabled figure shapes with a variety of limb lengths, all in primary colours, placed in a swirly circular pattern; as does the Cameroon stamp, it boldly puts these figures out there for us to see yet lacks any narrative beyond its own aesthetic appeal to the recognition of a diversity of human bodies. Similarly, there is a large number of stamps that favour the idea of the IYDP logo (of all colours/backgrounds), which would communicate little about disability beyond those who recognise the symbol.

Overall, then, we have lots of pale stamps, often featuring hybrid colours, with or without disabled people featured on them (far fewer disabled bodies are on these pale stamps than the bolder ones); others with a much more confident use of deeper saturations and 'pure' colours have no clear ideological message. Possible exceptions here include Great Britain's stamps, with a gentle nod in the direction of showing society our unmet needs and the means to allow us greater access.

I was quite struck by Singapore's collection of stamps – which demonstrated a clear commitment according to the IYDP mission; these included clear illustrations of the right to work, to receive and education, and also the right social integration. My favourite was the clear pro-access message provided by



SINGAPORE SG 407-10

an image of a wheelchair facing a pavement split into steps and a ramp. Nonetheless, this series, as did most of the other stamps, failed to show real disabled people. Although I have chosen to focus primarily on colour use, the almost universal failure (exceptions noted above) to include real disabled people on stamps is the most significant feature of this collection, a tendency exacerbated by the common coding of illustrating disabled bodies by using body parts, and logos, rather than images of whole people.

On a more positive note...



One stamp is outstanding in its capacity to convey an unambiguous message; this is one of the Costa Rican stamps. It is unequivocal in its ownership of its counter-ideological message. Communicated directly, this is clear message of a wheelchair user staring at steps they cannot use. It is underlined by the use of pure colours, the preponderance of red (perhaps used here to convey negativity such as danger), and the use of deep saturations (grey, blue and green for the steps, wheelchair and the wheelchair-users clothes). In contrast to the experience of Tonga, perhaps this stamp is symbolic of the strength of an early

**SAMOA SG 588-93**

commitment to disabled people's rights, as the only country I am aware of which has political party based on disabled people's rights – Partido de Acceso Sin Exclusión (Accessibility without Exclusion). It also has an ongoing reputation for inclusivity (Dunlop, 2020). A side note - the other two Costa Rican stamps also use bold colours and one of them is also overtly political in its depiction of a wheelchair user holding up the scales of justice. The third is rather more puzzling, with a background map of the country in a bold deep blue, and a rather homoerotic picture of two men (drawn in black and white) with the dominant (standing one) pointing at the sun. Perplexing. As is the Samoan stamp where Roosevelt appears to be giving a high five – in fact a celebration of his inauguration (forty-eight years earlier).



Another one of my favourites is the Mexican stamp, which depicts a boldly coloured, smiling soldier toy against a pale cyan - fading to very pale blue – background. I like disabled toys and have a mini collection; but this toy is marked as broken. He (I presume) has no right arm, yet he is banging his drum merrily with his left arm. A bewildering metaphor – a mix of pale and bright, insult and compliment (the equation of disabled people with broken toys and a happy active person who ‘marches to the beat of their own drum’ perhaps), and right and wrong - the ultimate synecdoche for the whole collection.

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1981 IYDP STAMPS **DIGITAL DISABILITY**



LICHTENSTEIN SG 769



JAPAN SG 1639



MALAGASY SG 435-6



MALTA SG 663-4



LIBYA SG 1068-70
(& SG 1125-6 OVERPRINTS)



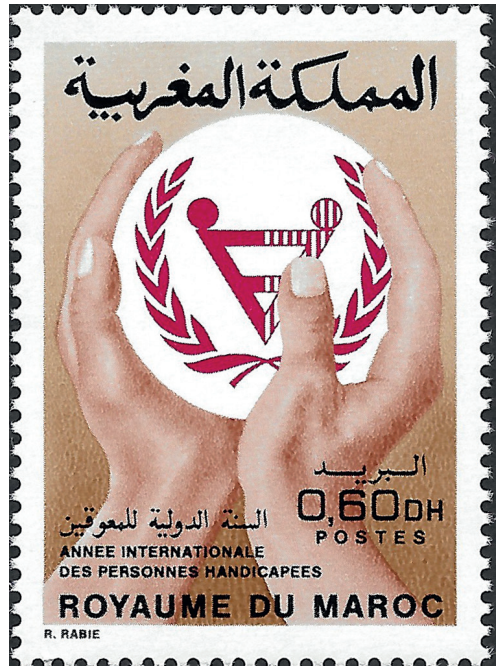
MAURITANIA SG 700



MOZAMBIQUE SG 869



NEW ZEALAND SG 1238

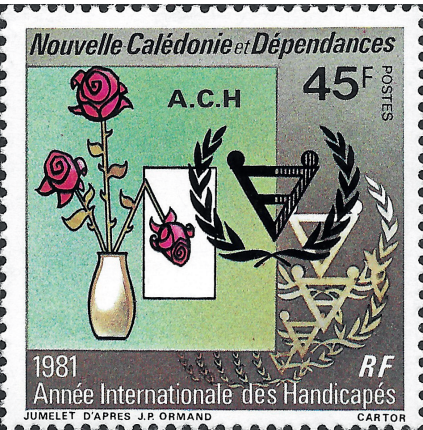


MOROCCO SG 582

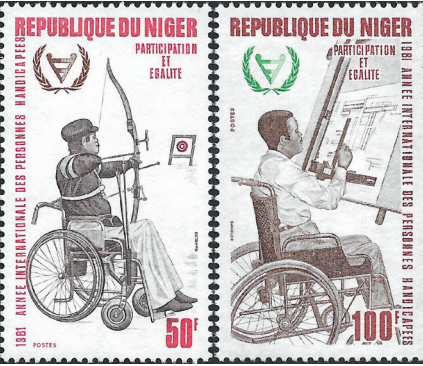


MONACO SG 1492

1981 IYDP STAMPS **DIGITAL DISABILITY**



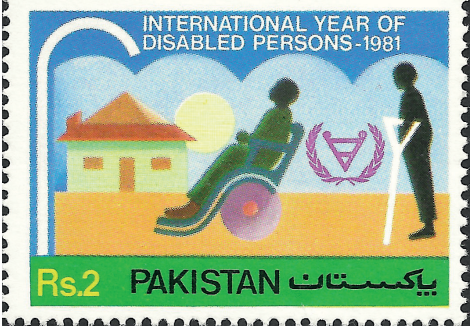
NEW CALEDONIA SG 663



NIGER SG 850-1



PHILIPPINES SG 1671-2



PAKISTAN SG 574-5



NIGERIA SG 421-2



POLAND SG 2770



SAN MARINO SG 1159



QATAR SG 705-6



SAUDI ARABIA SG 1263-4

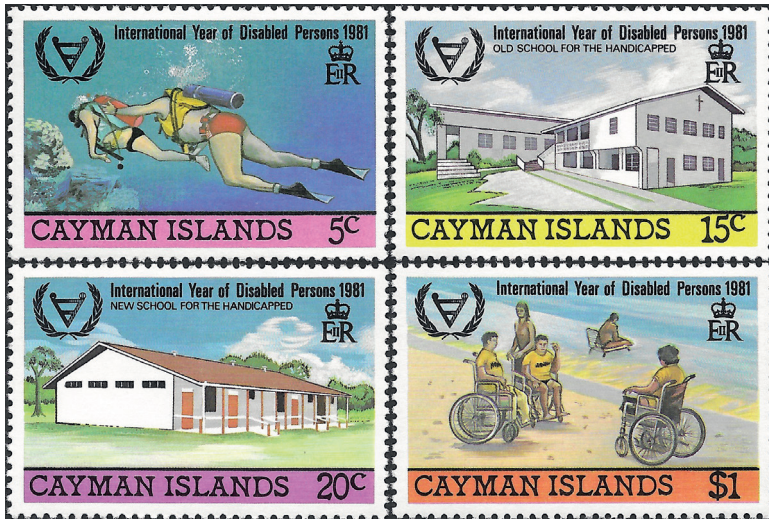


SOUTH KOREA SG 1468-9

SIMON MCKEOWN

I believe in taking time to enjoy visual moments with the sense of wonderment that often accompanies the viewing of a new and unknown landscape. I try mindfully to live in the moment. As a practice, it allows me to experience images before my conscious starts to think too much. When I opened the folder of over 300 images of stamps, I felt that I was on an international adventure, with so many countries represented. Many of the stamps were immediately personal to me and operated on a level of a shared commonality. In these tiny images, I reflected on the disabled community I am part of and a journey that is mirrored across the collection. I felt at home yet emotionally jolted. I was not expecting this from ubiquitous and, in my naive thoughts, plain, simple stamps. The memories came flooding back from when I was a disabled teenager and volunteer working with disabled children, living at home with disabled parents in 1981, the year the stamps were produced for the UN International Year of Disabled People (IYDP).

The visceral impact of these tiny images carries much more weight than I expected. By way of example, the Cayman Islands 20c stamp showcases a New School for the Handicapped. In close reading, I question



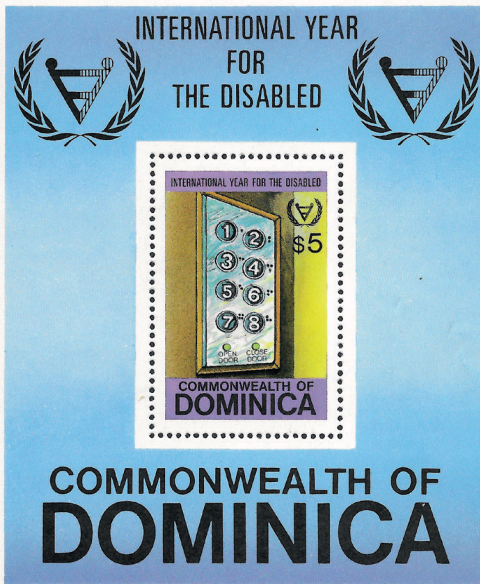
CAYMAN ISLANDS SG 537-40

whether this image was a signifier for the modern development of education for disabled people, on an island that supported inclusive sport, as indicated in the Diving 5c stamp. The illustrated 15c Old School for the Handicapped stamp presents a building that is much larger than the aforementioned New School and has a crucifix on an external wall. I am immediately reminded of Sister Ursula and my volunteering with the Catholic Handicapped Children's Society, an organisation that did so much important work for disabled people in my hometown at this time. Continents apart, in 1981 the UK was similarly building specialist 'handicapped' schools; such schools continue to operate across Europe today.



ETHIOPIA SG 1206-10

Impairment aids are commonly presented and are largely very similar across all the countries represented. As a designer and intermittent user of aids, I am fascinated by the items people use. In the collection, limb loss and difference are commonly presented. The Ethiopia 5c celebrates the 7th Anniversary of the Ethiopian Revolution with soldiers using familiar prosthetics in scenes of education and labour reminiscent of impaired UK-based soldiers being retrained post-WWI and WW2 (see page 94). The UK was once populated



COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICAN MS 786 & SG 782-5785

with similar rehabilitation centres where conflict-impaired people were rehabilitated physically and taught new labour skills.

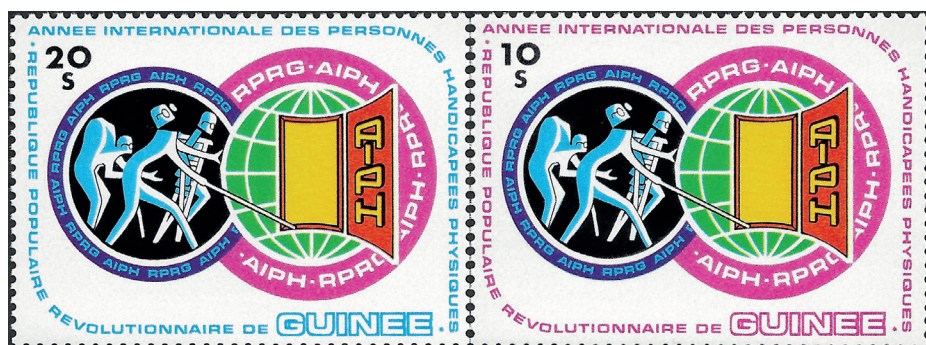
The 'universal' wheelchair makes many appearances, in photographs and drawings. Surprisingly, despite its being inappropriate in size and weight for so many, such as young children with small physical stature, it appears the same across continents. Alternative forms of specialist mobility beyond the wheelchair make appearances. In the UK, the Government once provided vehicles to impaired people to support social mobility and reintegration. Post-WW2 centres such as Finchdale in

Durham retrained impaired soldiers and provided them with three-wheeled adapted vehicles. In the Commonwealth of Dominica 75c stamp disabled people use identical vehicles. In the United Republic of Cameroon 150F stamp, we see a smartly dressed young man, drawn almost in a cartoon style, with a hand-cranked cycle, smiling. I wonder if he's just received the cycle he is using or is just simply enjoying his independent ride. I have a similar image from my family, that of my grandfather as a young man enjoying a ride on an identical three-wheeler. In my photograph, my grandfather is also a young man, and I wonder how he came to have his carriage. It must have been a gift or charity benevolence as he and his family could not have afforded to purchase such an expensive item. I wonder how the Cameroon person received their carriage? The Charity Model of disability, despite its many failings, was and still is personally critical in many countries including the UK. Further, I wonder how the design of the tricycle, which is heavy, cumbersome and dangerous in use became so internationally accepted across the world.

Graphically, many of the stamps are hand-drawn, etched in a pre-photoshop non-digital era. They have a magical analogue appeal and charm, which also extends to the concepts and drawing skills. The artistic licence serves to confuse the meaning and semiotics behind some of the stamps, making some playfully hard to understand. The 100f Gabonaise Republic stamp has



two androgynous people holding opposing hands under the banner 'Participation et Egalite'. Are they Space Invaders? In the Guinee 10s stamp impaired silver robots with more than a passing resemblance to the 'Cyclons' in the 1970's TV series 'Battlestar Galactica' walk forwards as a group. The far-left character certainly has an alien spine impairment; one lacking any base in reality. This is not to poke fun at any of the stamps, but to highlight that it is not always clear that the artist is deeply aware of the impairments they are representing or the overall context of the IYDP. This raises questions as to how the



GUINEE SG 1096-7

individual stamps were commissioned, by whom, why and the role of the artist involved whilst highlighting the importance of the slogan, 'nothing about us, without us'. Were any of those involved in the production of the stamps themselves disabled?

The artists involved approached their tasks using various methods. from raw flat graphic design through to life-like sketches and the occasional photograph. Impairment is referred to both directly and obliquely. As a deafened person I particularly like the hallucinatory and 1960's-inspired Indonesian Republic (200) image. This stamp seems to indicate visually the difficulties of noise. The Mali 100F shows two iconic heads, side-on, with a passing similarity to the Easter Island statues, in an attempt to indicate (I believe) eyesight impairment. Dark and foreboding woodcuts, similar in style to Edvard Munch's work, appear in the Norwegian 150 and 220. I wait to hear the scream as the group of ghouls walks hand-in-hand towards me. Why either stamp is related to disability is not



INDONESIA SG 1625-6



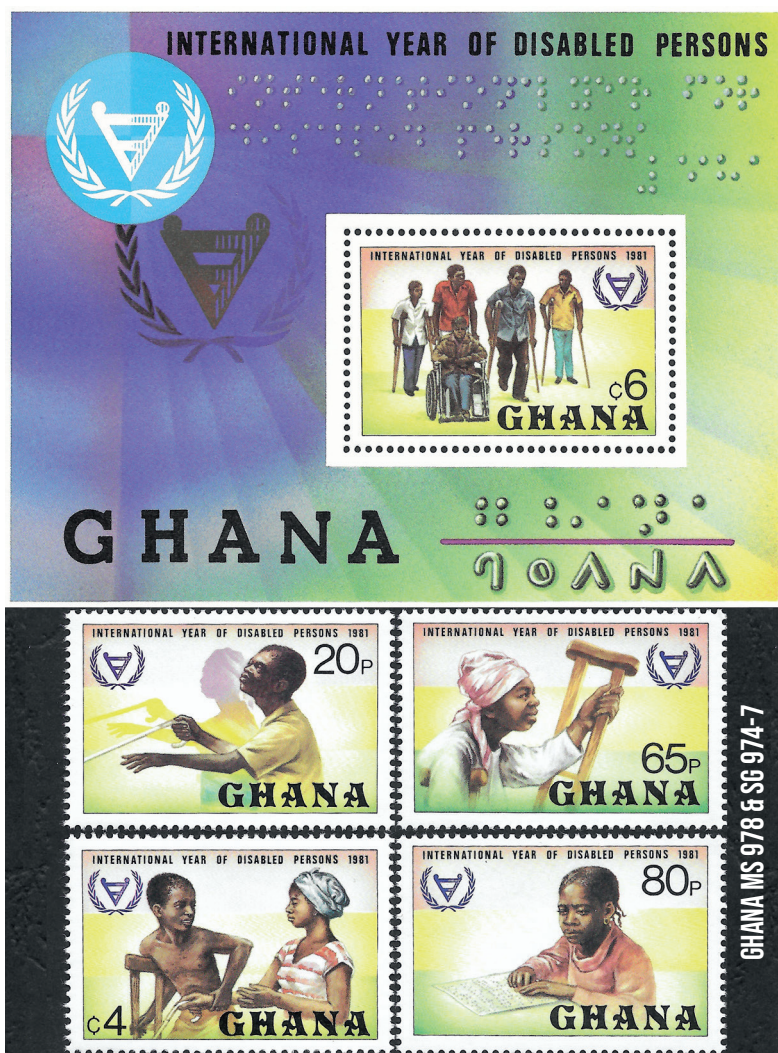
MALI - SG 853-4



NORWAY SG 884-5

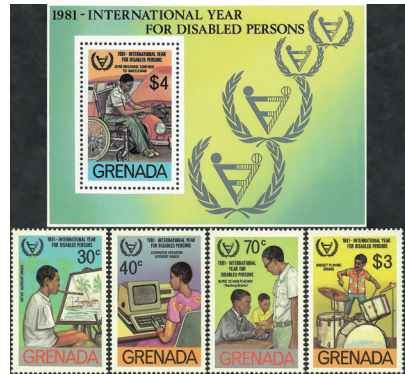
clear. Many of the stamps feature a laurel leaf in which the IYDP 1981 logo is held. This has a passing similarity to Superman's logo which I remember as a disabled child. I wonder if the United Nations in New York, who called for the IYDP year, or their design team realised this.

There is stamp and visual design innovation to be found among the images. Braille is found in the Ghana 6c stamp. It's drawn on as part of the composition, but I wonder if it was also pressed into the paper so as to be sensed by touch as well. It is only in recent





GIBRALTAR SG 459



GRENADA MS 1173 & SG 1169-72

years I have seen this in practice in print, in the UK., though Dutch paper money used embossing at least fifty years ago. Esoterically, the Gibraltarian 14p stamp plays with graphic design approaches, to create shadows and illusions of a female face, without further explanation of the impairment suggested. This is in contradiction to the lifelike Grenadian \$4 stamp, which describes in text and the visuals the impaired person. Firstly, they show an 'Auto Mechanic Confined to Wheelchair' and secondly, the 40c stamp describes a female 'Computer Operator Without Hands'; both quite surprising images without context. How did she lose her hands and can she operate a computer with the replacement aids she now wears? Similarly, can he fix a car from a chair? The Ghana 4c stamp demonstrates cooperation between a male who is using crutches while he leads a blind female using a white cane. The happiness of the \$3 Grenada drummer boy is obvious; similarly, the Liberia 23c shows



an impaired person playing on a swing - and the images go on, such that it's easy to get lost in the melee as the stamps flit from topic to topic.

The difference in culture and language can cause confusion and potential misunderstanding. What does the dove in the Japan 60+10 signify? The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 50fils features the outline of an eye, filled with hands and above an image of a red love heart with a candle in the centre. Lacking cultural knowledge to position these more esoteric images, I'm not certain of their narrative. Many stamps demonstrate flowers and trees with a difference, e.g., one flower out of a group that is wilted or a section of a



tree with odd leaves, different from the norm. Specifically, the Tunisia stamp (front cover), stamp, infers that disabled people are the broken branch of an otherwise healthy tree. Overall the collection is diverse and features hand and mouth painting, sign language, accessible sport, wheelchair use, labour, technology and aids, rehabilitation and disabled historical figures including Helen Keller, Cervantes, Beethoven and Roosevelt. The Barbados 25c proudly introduces basic fingerspelling and much more.

Interpreting the stamps in this collection is, however, complex. My responses and gaze are provoked by a commonality of experience,

and I respond to the activities and their logic depicted as if they were/are normal and acceptable because I am conditioned to do so. Society is so used to seeing disabled children and adults as part of separate 'other'. We are taught to accept well-meaning charity, educational separation, and pity without question and so much of what we see depicted in 1981 is being repeated today.

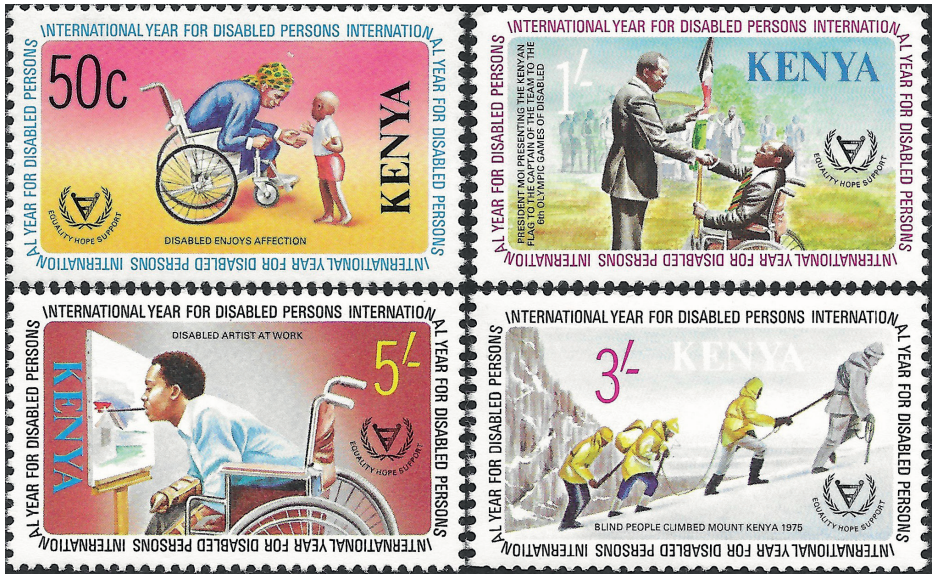
As a collection what do they demonstrate? The IYDP stamps suggest globally that many histories of disability are shared. They reveal the everyday quotidian nature of both stamps and impairment. Beyond the endearing and smiling 4 Peso Mexican single-arm drummer toy, what do they signify?

Critically, we have first to address their ability to both feel and be common. The problem with shared experiences is that they can be normalised when they should have been classified as deeply unacceptable. The Charity Model is present and reminds us that disability rights have not moved on far enough from the Victorian period. The Medical Model is prominent and reminds us that disability is still so often seen as a personal issue to be fixed. Disabled lives should not be dependent on such models, which are not based on social justice despite the kindness and care exhibited by those involved. Such models (think food banks/Charity Model here in the UK) define the cruelty of systems devised by the gatekeepers who control the binary switch, to enable or disable, impaired people. Notionally, the stamps provide us with a unique opportunity to witness a snapshot of

impairment internationally at a fixed time. It is not enough, however, for us to study the aids represented, or perhaps the gender imbalance that also appears present. These stamps are 'official' messages, packets of data that present opinions on and strategies for disabled people from the highest level. Stamps carry Government level-endorsed significance beyond their quotidian use. What they don't say is just as important and revelatory; the silences speak.

The 'inspirational porn'[1] demonstrated in 3'- Kenyan stamp which showcases three yellow-garbed blind climbers ascending Mount Kenya in 1975 masks the 67% of disabled people in Kenya living in poverty. [2] The four UK stamps present are tightly controlled and limited. Fingerspelling DEAF, a foot painting, guide dog and wheelchair on a gradient reveal nothing of the uphill struggle to achieve independent living and rights to employment, later encapsulated in the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995. Politically without any ambition, these images are timeless nothingnesses: deliberately so. They fail to stake any claim for an equitable disabled life and silently mask the assault on disabled people and their rights, under the guise of austerity that followed in later years.

Disabled people work in the stamps. They can be trained to work in wood shops and with computers to undertake 'useful' mainstream labour. They have normative value and are not just expensive 'useless eaters', living a life 'unworthy of living' as formulated by the perverted yet highly influential academics Binding and Hocke



KENYA SG 193-6

in 1920s Germany.[3] It is interesting to note that people with multiple complex needs are, however, excluded. Disabled people can despite their impairments can be trained to overcome all. The 10.60s Ecuador Republic stamp reminds me of the cover design for a 1930s German publication entitled *Smash the Crutches*, by Hans Würtz. Würtz thought it possible to train disabled people to reject and leave behind their impairments, freeing their 'crippled' souls.[4] And yet, training, labour and value are not neutral concepts; they are dominated by ableist thought and direction. Similarly, the gaze through which disabled people are viewed is not neutral. A much-used concept in the Charity Model: pity extracts donations. The Kenya 50c Disabled Enjoys Affection repeats a familiar unpleasant trope through the image of a wheelchair user



leaning forward to hold a small child's hand. The image and text suggest a longing for a family and the absence of a child, contending that disabled people cannot have and/or raise families.

Whilst it would be fascinating to know more about the process behind each stamp's commissioning, the intention, and the role of the artists involved, it is important to consider what the stamps represent broadly, beyond for instance a review that reveals that proportionally women and girls are more often absent. I could continue to elaborate

on the disabled 'gaze' and question why Princess Diana and Charles are present. Similarly, I could digress into material technology, mobility and universal design for disability or the transhumanism of the robots and the ghouls of Norway. Instead, I want to question why these stamps exist at all. That they do represents, I would argue, a failure across multiple systems and societies to engage with and present the systematic opportunities, education and resources needed to empower and provide equality for disabled people. Despite how much I admire the care and compassion represented in the images, and how engaged I feel with so many of the narratives, the stamps represent failure. The lack of political support for disability empowerment must be a great shame to many nations. That these stamps were issued to celebrate a 'special year, must lead us to question why the UN (and its signatories) needed to create the year. There should have been no need for a 'special year' that ultimately confirmed disabled people as 'different and lesser than'. Separation has a deeply troubled history as addressed by the disabled academic Tobin Siebers, who argued that 'Disqualification as a symbolic process removes individuals from the ranks of quality human beings, putting them at risk of unequal treatment, bodily harm and death". [5]

Finally, the stamps do much to hide and disguise the disability campaigns that occurred around this period. This snapshot is woefully incomplete and fails to speak of the successes gained towards equality. One small image, hiding away in the collection, on one

stamp stands out: a wheelchair user holds up what appears to be a Scales of Justice (Costa Rica 260c) in a call for social justice recognised nationally through the mechanism of the stamp. In a year of celebration, it is one of the few images in the collection that makes such an explicit and important statement.

NOTES

[1] Sheila Young, 'I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much'. TEDx 2014 <https://is.gd/uxtTTH>

[2] Krystle Kabare 'Social Protection and Disability in Kenya', 2018. <https://is.gd/zb3TOa> (page 5)

[3] Mostert, Mark P. 'Useless eaters: Disability as genocidal marker in Nazi Germany'. in *The Journal of Special Education*; Fall 2002; 36, 3; ProQuest pg. 155

[4] Irina Metzler. 'Skeletons in the Car Park'. 2013. Personal Blog. <https://is.gd/L4q8KX>

[5] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*. Ann Arbor, Mich. USA: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 23.



URUGUAY SG 1790



PANAMA SG 1286



PERU SG 1505-6



SWITZERLAND SG 1003



SYRIA SG 1513

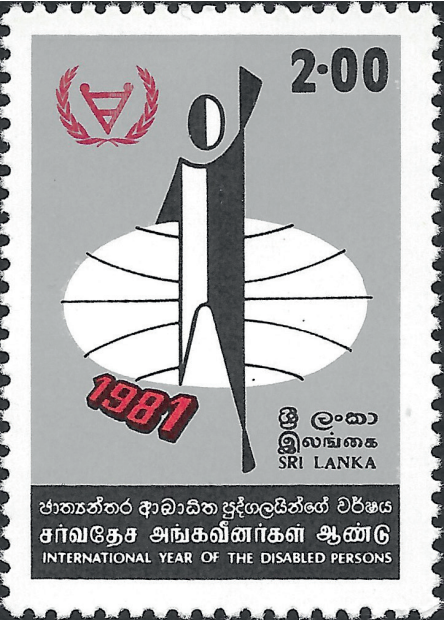
1981 IYDP STAMPS **DIGITAL DISABILITY**



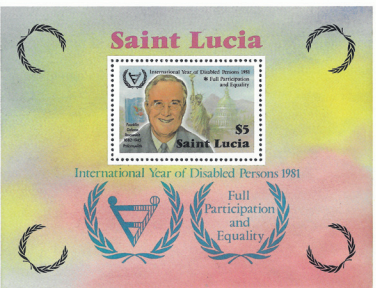
SURINAM SG 1046-8



SWEDEN SG 1070-1

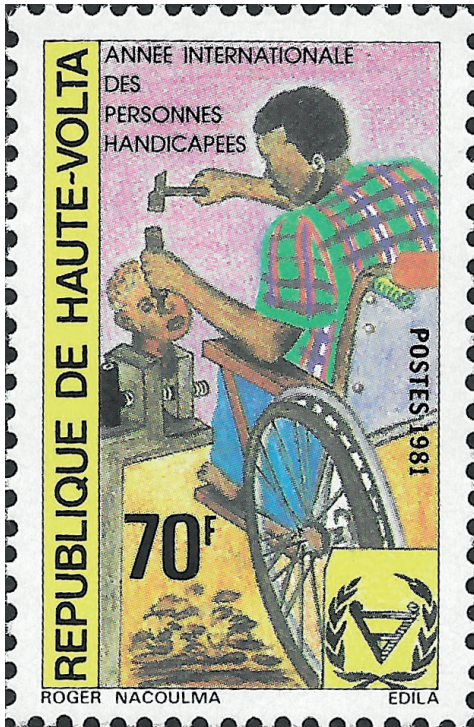


SRI LANKA SG 735





UGANDA MS 358 OF SG 354-7



UPPER VOLTA SG 604



TOGO MS 1542 & SG 1539-41



TANZANIA SG 333-6



UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES SG 130-3

1981 IYDP STAMPS **DIGITAL DISABILITY**



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SG 581-4



VATICAN CITY SG 767



WALLIS AND FORTUNA ISLANDS SG 377



ZIMBABWE SG 602-5

NIGEL SMITH

To review a 40-year-old collection of stamps, published to mark the International Year of Disabled Persons, is to step back in time to a period when postage stamps enjoyed a certain prestige and significance.

As a child, it was always a pleasure to receive airmail from distant relatives in the Caribbean or North America. The stamps offered colour, excitement and variety. Domestic editions, meanwhile, featured the United Kingdom regent's head in two or three colours, so it was the stamped airmails and their references to distant adventure and to exoticism, that fired the imagination in my small, dreary corner of Albion.

How quaint that seems now in the era of Zoom chats, WhatsApp messaging and the ubiquitous email; and how 'tap dancing in top hats' is the idea of committing an important socio-politico global campaign to the real estate of a stamp measuring slightly more than a centimetre either way!

Surely the UN's communication plan boasted a substantial and comprehensive cross media budget to encourage respect, participation and equality for disabled people everywhere, after two decades of tumultuous social and political change, focused on ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.

Yet, the idea that stamps should warrant their own campaign brief in the 1980-1981 project document, alongside television and radio spend, newspaper and magazine promotion (etc.) is yet more proof of the relentless march of technology and the dizzying pace of change.

In just 40 years, we have moved from licking all four corners to swiping left. We now live in a communication world based on Facebook ad spend and Instagram marketing strategy. 'What is the mobile strategy? How will we reach millennials? This is the high ground of today's marketing and publicity campaigns. Stamps are the equivalent of a horse and carriage. The fact that stamp collections mattered at the dawn of the 1980s, at least to the decision-makers, is demonstrated by the cross messaging on display in this collection.

The year's other great event - the ill-fated 1981 marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana - is commemorated on the UN stamp published by the Cook Islands and Aitutaki. It may be that royals habitually adorn stamps produced for the island. The cynic in me reads the acknowledgement of the royal nuptials and is then persuaded that the stamp collector market may have been an important consideration in the choice of image.

This is as modern as communication gets! The stamps were priced so as to offer "a surtax to benefit the handicapped." As such,

the campaign message of awareness and inclusion was boosted by the use of the most powerful celebrity image of the year!

Imagine the impact of Leo Messi, JHus or yes, I said it ... the Kardashians, using their celebrity to go hard on key themes of disability rights and ploughing some of the financial rewards into disability rights organisations. That's what HRH was doing with this Cook Island and Aitutaki stamp 40 years ago!

Several countries juxtaposed the gravitas of their own national VIPs with the campaign logo. Many states favoured pop art symbolism in promoting the substance of the international campaign. Intriguingly, and with varying results, several nations saw a creative opportunity in the UN campaign to bring their own artistic and ethical interpretations to the struggle for inclusion of people with disabilities.

I liked a stamp published by Algeria - yes, everyone deserves their flowers too. Andorra's contribution gave me pause for thought, as did the 'yes we can' message published by the Maldives, which turned their stamps into a veritable history lesson. However, I am not at all sure about the slogan offered by Chile that accompanied its stamp - 'To the limited child, unlimited love' and have no idea what Nepal was saying in the artwork for its stamp.

Disappointingly, the Netherlands seemed to be working from a 19th century census

1981 IYDP STAMPS **DIGITAL DISABILITY**



ANDORRA FRENCH SG F318



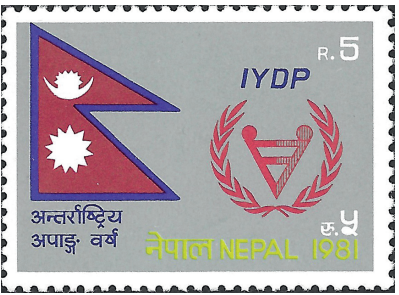
ANDORRA SPANISH SG 134



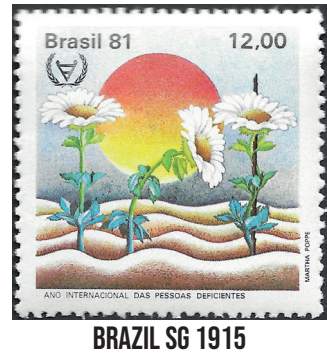
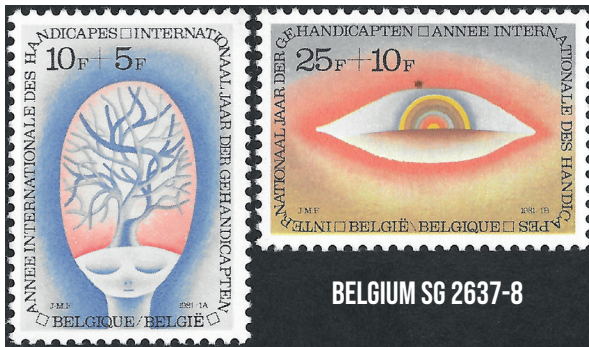
MALDIVE ISLANDS MS 945 & SG 941-4



CHILE SG 891



NEPAL SG 409



survey. And what on earth was going on in the comms rooms in Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, Denmark, and especially in Afghanistan, when the respective contributions to the international campaign were agreed? At first glance, Afghanistan's stamp portrays what looks suspiciously to be an alien life form. Or is it a baby in a nappy? What, for heaven's sake, is the link to disability? Is the baby looking into a mirror, or is it not one but two babies? Are they conjoined twins?

You see, there is no end to the speculation conjured by this image but frankly, the image left me without a strong feeling as to what was its communication point. It's me! Something was lost in translation. This stamp like so many others in the collection may make cultural and linguistic references which escape my narrow western point of view. Therein lies one of the problems in reviewing a global campaign and trying to assess the communication impact.



CUBA SG 2732



DENMARK SG 710

The lack of linguistic and cultural information is debilitating. And, it must be said, that I found it a real struggle to assess this 40-year-old stamp collection without imposing current aesthetics and values. Yes, too many of the stamps are gendered and render invisible the place and contribution of women and girls.

Globally, there is a tireless pandering to able-bodied tolerance of 'acceptable disability.' Too many images hint strongly that participation and inclusion are best achieved through work and economic participation and / or sporting contribution. The understanding of disability is not universal. There is little in this collection to suggest that the majority of countries held close ideas of essential human worth, potential and rights, which are not rooted in employment and physical activity.

As mentioned earlier, the stamps themselves are a communication problem too. The issue of communication real estate is crucial, with the stamp offering little more than 15mm each way to engage in the modern practice of telling a story, stimulating the interest of the viewer and encouraging further action.

With this understanding, many countries sought only to depict people with impairments in a favourable and sympathetic way. I lost count of the number of countries which resorted to publishing images of people (mostly men or boys) in wheelchairs or using crutches.

Many stamps show disabled people at work. Is that the principal way in which disabled people with disabilities can, as suggested by the UN Resolution 31/ 123, “take part fully in the life and development of their societies, enjoy living conditions equal to those of other citizens, and have an equal share in improved conditions resulting from socio-economic development?”

The logic of this communication is that disabled people are just like the able-bodied if they work as able-bodied people do and play sport with the enthusiasm and vigour of the able-bodied. Is that how we understand disability now?

Canes, crutches and wheelchairs are symbols that lend themselves well to artistic interpretation and register positively with an able-bodied public. Whilst emphasis on the totems of physical impairment is understandable, isn't an international campaign powered by a prestigious global authority, an unrivalled opportunity to explore other images and communicate more broadly beyond the Stevie Wonder-Stephen Hawking paradigm. This was the challenge met decisively by the British broadcaster Channel Four in its celebrated media promotion of the 2012 Paralympics.

It must be accepted too that stamps are not message boards for today's in-your-face politicking. If the communication brief aimed at visibility, sympathy and “tolerance,”



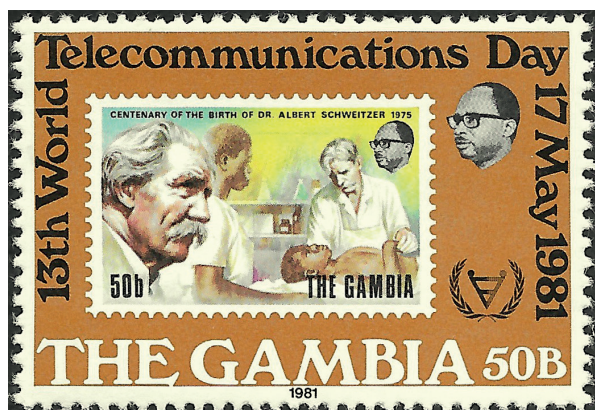
SPAIN SG 2639

then the stamps produced show mission accomplished. All these criticisms may have their place and should serve as mood music accompanying the stamp review. Nevertheless, there are several contributions from states included in this collection, which do emerge relatively unscathed from a modern communication critique.

Recognition and a demand for visibility seem



RWANDA SG 1073-80



GAMBIA SG 452

to have inspired the stamps produced by the Dutch Antilles, the Dominican Republic, Liberia and Turkey. Barbados adopted a belt and braces approach to the campaign communication goals. I appreciate the creative enjoyment this campaign seems to have brought to Costa Rica, Norway, Spain and in one stamp from Rwanda, which featured a boy in the matrix but the Gambia went too far in seeking to combine promoting the rights

of disabled people with publicity for the 13th World Telecommunications Day.

However, my personal favourite hails from the small and clearly sports-obsessed Caribbean Island of Antigua. The campaign subject is front and centre. The images are all about inclusion. The image of the blind archer in particular serves as a sweetener for a broader conversation. That's about as much as a stamp could hope to achieve. Bravo Antigua!





YEMEN PDR SG 269-71



ZAIRE SG 1076-83



YEMEN 688-93 & MS 694

MISCELLANEOUS

Most countries of the world, through their respective postal authorities, issued official IYDP stamps by including the IYDP text and/or logo (branding) on the stamp. A few countries, such as Uruguay, issued additional stamp(s) themed around disability in 1981 in celebration of their own day or year of disability. These stamps are included in this Miscellaneous section so as to satisfy obsessive collectors. Furthermore, some countries did not, for one reason or another, participate in the IYDP postal issue at all, yet nevertheless issued disability-themed stamp(s); these are often linked to specific impairments, such as 'blindness' or 'deafness'. The additional disability, or impairment-themed, stamps unrelated to the IYDP initiative are shown in this section, for all of us 'completists'.

In seeking to include as comprehensive a 1981 Disability Stamp collection as possible, we have indicated the rich world of philately around the theme of disability that exists. No other single year has produced such a broad/global collection of stamp issues; the Paralympics is starting to come close.



AUSTRIA SG 1895



BENIN SG 827



BULGARIA SG 3313



BURKINA FASO SG 1041



COOK ISLANDS MS 826 OF SG 824-5



ETHIOPIA SG 1211-3



FRANCE SG 2285



HUTT RIVER



ISLE OF MAN SG 209-10



NETHERLANDS SG 1369-73



NIUE MS 447 OF SG 444-6

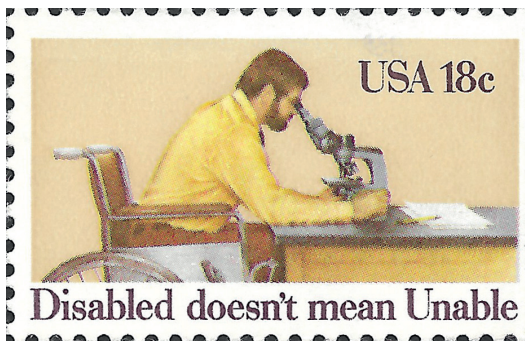




SOUTH AFRICA SG 495-6



1992 URUGUAY SG 1967-8



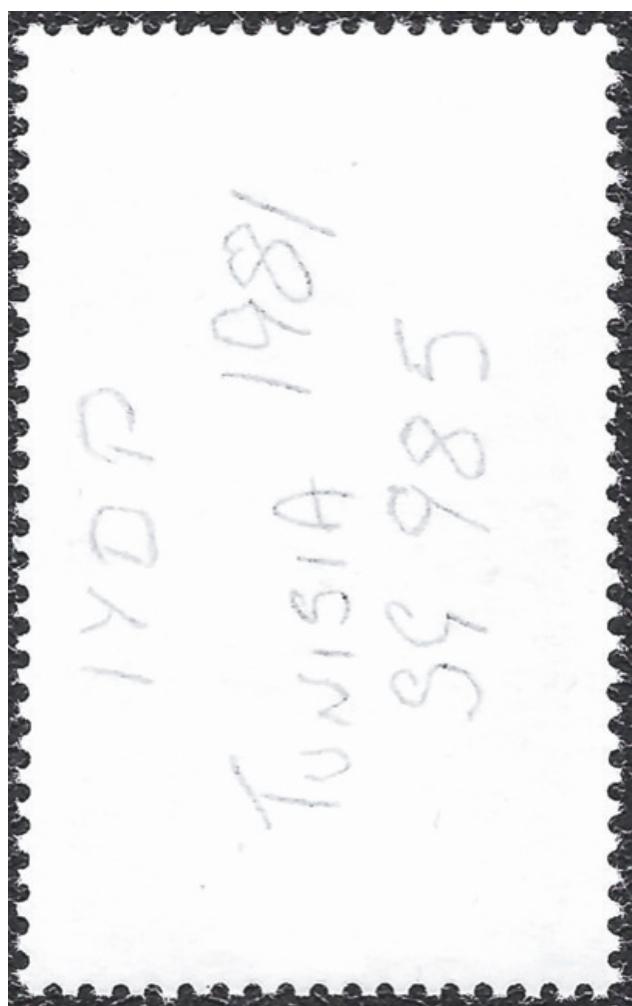
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA SG 1899

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