

One of Us: Conjoined twins and the future of normal

Alice Dreger, Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 154

...in the words of Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "to critique the politics of appearance that governs our interpretation of physical difference, to suggest that disability requires accommodation rather than compensation, and to shift our conception of disability from pathology to identity."

These changes enable us to envision a different future – for people with unusual anatomies, for their parents and children, for their doctors, for their neighbors, friends, and lovers. In this sense, a different future for us all, one in which technological intervention is no longer the primary means for demonstrating caring. Of course, many people with typical anatomies would have to help to fully realize this dream. Women didn't get the vote just because they wanted it; they got it because many of them wanted it and enough men made it possible. Likewise, civil rights legislation would never have passed without the help of whites in power. Maybe we're nearing the point where those of us born with more typical anatomies can truly rethink and reinvent how we enable others to become one of us.

To get to that point, we will have to come to a full understanding of the socially constructed nature of disability. Perhaps it is that symbol for "handicapped accessible" (really a symbol for "wheelchair accessible") which leads people to assume disability is only about a person's ability or inability to enter certain places. Too many people, including many of those who could legitimately be called disabled, think disability is about legs that don't move rather than the failure to build ramps. In thinking that disability is about how far an individual can extend her leg – as opposed to the way an individual's anatomy is affected by the interaction of body and environment, including oppressive societal assumptions – people with unusual anatomies (and their families and doctors) often fail to see how the disability rights movement concerns them. People with unusual anatomies need, first and foremost, a pride movement that would encourage them to see themselves as full citizens and as a group with certain social problems in common. Raising their political consciousness would benefit not only them, but their families and doctors as well. And I would suggest that that consciousness-raising start where most do: with an understanding of the historical basis for the oppression. Once we recognize the historical basis, a different future becomes imaginable.

Reading from Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation

Eli Clare

Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class; class strains against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race... everything finally piling into a single human body. To write about any aspect of identity, any aspect of the body, means writing about this entire maze. This I know, and yet the question remains: where to start? Maybe with my own white skin, stubbly red hair, left ear pierced, shoulders set slightly off center, left riding higher than right, hands tremoring, traced with veins, legs well-muscled. Or with me in the mirror, dressing to go out, knotting my tie, slipping into my blazer, curve of hip and breast vanishing beneath my clothes. Or possibly with the memory of how my body felt swimming in the river, chinook fingerlings nibbling at my toes. There are a million ways to start, but how do I reach beneath the skin?

from *Exile and Pride*, p. 123. (ISBN: 0896086054, published by South End Press)

From "Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love"

Father Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt

When we speak of hospitality we are always addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion. Each of us makes choices about who will and who will not be included in our lives... Issues of inclusion and exclusion, while personal, are not just personal. Our entire culture excludes many people. If you are in a wheelchair, for example, you are excluded because there are places you can't go. If you are very young, if you are very old, you are excluded... Hospitality has an inescapable moral dimension to it... It is an issue involving what it means to be human. All of our talk about hospitable openness doesn't mean anything as long as some people continue to be tossed aside...

But calling hospitality a moral issue does not tell us the whole truth about hospitality either. A moral issue can become bogged down in legalisms, and hospitality is no legalistic ethical issue. It is instead a spiritual practice, a way of becoming more human, a way of understanding yourself. Hospitality is both the answer to modern alienation and injustice *and* a path to a deeper spirituality.

From "Heretic's Faith: Vocabulary for Religious Liberals"

Frederic John Muir - p. 21, *Beloved Community*

The faith community called the church has always had a vision. The Unitarian Universalist vision is one of life in community as it could be... Preacher and prophet have spoken about the "Beloved Community," which is a phrase used in many congregations, including many Unitarian Universalist congregations. In Christian circles, people refer to the Kingdom of God... which is that time, usually after life as we know it, when there will be equality, wholeness, and meaning for all people. In Unitarian Universalism... our focus has always been on this life. The Beloved Community is what life could be like, right now, right here - not in some hereafter.

When we stand on the bridge of anti-oppression and intentionally name the demons of oppression and injustice, we are acknowledging that we will be committed to making the Beloved Community a reality and that it will only happen because we are committed and are willing to do the hard work that anti-oppression demands... The Beloved Community - it is a journey toward wholeness.

Circle Stories

Riva Lehrer writes about her artwork:

The body is the first story; our text of first meeting. I see you, you see me, skin, bone, eyes, hair: assumptions pour forth like a rip in a dam. See the thousand imprints of sex, nation, money, clues to the familiar and exotic. We read and decide in eyeblink time. When bone and blood show an unfamiliar shape, the judgments freeze into a first, rigid wall between you and I.

So paint the story of surface and bone explicit, unavoidable, and ask

what did you fear then

and what do you think now.

Riva Lehrer's Circle Stories

is a series of portraits of people in a variety of fields, including the arts, academia and political activism. Each has a significant physical disability, and an interest in exploring body issues in his or her own work. This project began in 1997 and currently includes ten works.

The word "Circle" refers to several aspects of the project. The portraiture method is a circular one, involving extensive interviews with each participant. We talk about their lives, work, and experience of disability. We both suggest possible imagery, seeking imagery that accurately reflects their experience. In this way we arrive at a collaborative composition.