In the session "Disability Studies Programs," Susan Schweik gave a presentation entitled "Doing / Not Doing Disability Studies at Berkeley," and James V. Ferris delivered a paper called "Disability Studies at Madison: The Wisconsin Idea." (Schweik did not submit a written version of her presentation for reprinting or summary.)

Ferris discussed the institutional conditions at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, that gave rise to disability studies there. A document from 1995 proposing a cluster-hiring initiative emphasized the need for interdisciplinary collaborative work among faculty members across the colleges. The cluster idea represented a strategic opportunity to meet curricular needs that were unlikely to receive funding under normal institutional practices.

In fall 2000 a new center for the humanities opened on the Madison campus. It hosted interdisciplinary humanities workshops, funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The center won a grant to establish a disability studies reading and discussion group. A symposium held in 2001, entitled The Body in Real Time: Disability Studies in the Humanities, featured well-established scholars in the field and solidified the place of disability studies at Madison. The symposium organizers recruited faculty members who had not been a part of the reading and discussion group to serve as respondents, thereby engaging a new group of campus citizens in the topic.

By 2001 nearly sixty faculty members from eight of the university's thirteen colleges had signed on to a cluster-hiring initiative in disability studies. Three positions, including one at the senior level, were awarded. Because of budgetary constraints, only two clusters received authorization to hire, one of which was the disability studies initiative. The campus has seen other measures of interest in disability studies: a student interest group and a consortium among the institutions of the University of Wisconsin system. —RGF

Disability Aesthetics

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AESTHETICS TRACKS THE EMOTIONS THAT SOME bodies feel in the presence of other bodies. But all bodies are not created equal when it comes to aesthetic response. Taste and disgust are volatile reactions that reveal the ease or disease with which one body might incorporate another. Disability aesthetics seeks to emphasize the presence of different bodies and minds in the tradition of aesthetic representation—that tradition concerned most

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167860 Published online by Cambridge University Press

precisely with the appearance of the beautiful. It refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body and this body's definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty as the sole determination of the aesthetic. It is not a matter of representing the exclusion of disability from aesthetic history—since such an exclusion has not taken place—but of making the influence of disability obvious. This goal may take two forms: (1) to establish disability as a critical framework that questions the presuppositions underlying definitions of aesthetic production and appreciation; (2) to establish disability as a significant value in itself, worthy of future development.

To argue that disability has a rich but hidden role in the history of aesthetics is not to say that disability has been excluded. Rather, disability is rarely recognized for itself, even though it is often the factor that establishes works as superior examples of aesthetic beauty. Disability intercedes to make the difference between good and bad art—and not as one would initially expect. Good art incorporates disability. Beauty always maintains an underlying sense of disability, and increasing this sense over time may actually renew works of art that risk to fall out of fashion because of changing standards of taste. It is often the presence of disability that allows the beauty of an artwork to endure. Would the Venus de Milo still be considered one of the great examples of aesthetic and human beauty if she had both her arms?

Nazi art, by contrast, is considered kitsch because it pursued so relentlessly a bombastic perfection of the body. Sculptures and paintings cherished by the Nazis exhibit a stultifying perfection of the human figure. The Nazis rejected modern art as degenerate and ugly because they viewed it as representing physical and mental disability. Hitler saw in

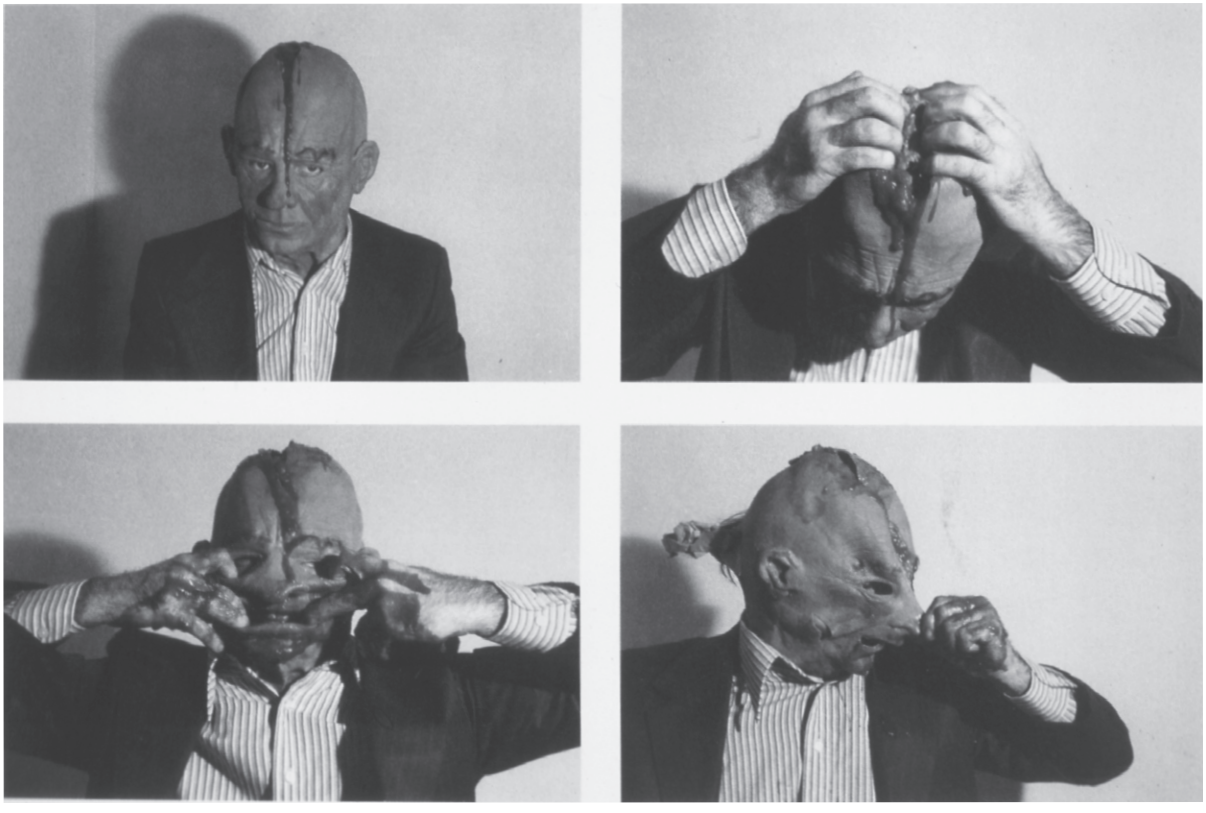


FIG. 1
Paul McCarthy, *Hollywood Halloween,* 1977. Performance, Los Angeles, CA. Reproduced by permission of Paul McCarthy.

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167860 Published online by Cambridge University Press

paintings by Amedeo Modigliani, Paul Klee, and Marc Chagall images of "misshapen cripples," "cretins," and racial inferiors when the rest of the world saw masterpieces of modern art (Mosse 26). Modern art has been so successful, I would argue, because it claims disability as a distinct version of the beautiful; it moves us because of its refusal of genius, bodily integrity, and perfect health.

One of the central doctrines of modern aesthetics is disinterestedness, which defines the power of an artwork in direct proportion to the urgency of the desires and appetites overcome in the beholder. Hunger, sexual desire, and greed have no place in the appreciation of artworks, despite the fact that these appetites are constant themes in art. Disability aesthetics challenges the classic notion of disinterestedness in aesthetic appreciation in two obvious ways. It refuses to beautify the human body, and it favors art made out of materials that spark powerful responses in beholders. In short, disability aesthetics embraces a different materialism of art. *Hollywood Halloween*, by Paul McCarthy, for example, pictures the artist tearing a Halloween mask from his head, but because the mask is stuffed with hamburger meat and ketchup in



FIG. 2
Paul McCarthy, *Plaster Your Head and One Arm into a Wall,* 1973. Performance, Pasadena, CA. Reproduced by permission of Paul McCarthy.



FIG. 3
Judith Scott, untitled, no date. Photograph by Leon A. Borensztein. Reproduced by permission of the Creative Growth Center.

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167860 Published online by Cambridge University Press

addition to the artist's head, the effect is a kind of self-defacement (fig. 1). The transformation of the artist from eerie able-bodiedness to the defacement of disability is the work's essential movement. The work reverses the apparently natural tendency to represent any form of corporeal transformation as driven by the desire for improvement or cure.

In addition to the challenge to disinterestedness and the assault on human beauty is McCarthy's representation of the mental condition of the artist. As his performances grow more intense and irrational, the audience begins to react to him as if he were mentally disabled. McCarthy's commitment to elemental behavior—smearing himself with food, repeating meaningless actions, fondling himself in public—asks to be seen as idiocy, as if the core value of genius were being systematically removed from the aesthetic in preference to cognitive disorder. *Plaster Your Head and One Arm into a Wall*, in which McCarthy embeds himself into a wall and covers himself with plaster, provides an example of these different aesthetic values (fig. 2). McCarthy takes the analogy between artwork and body to its limit, challenging ideas about how the human should be imagined.

The appreciation of the work of art is a topic well rehearsed in the history of aesthetics, but rarely is it considered from the vantage point of the disabled mind—no doubt because doing so would disrupt the longstanding belief that pronouncements of taste depend on a form of human intelligence as autonomous and imaginative as the art object itself. Artistic production also seems to reflect a limited and well-defined range of mental actions. The work of Judith Scott challenges the absolute rupture between mental disability and art and applies critical pressure on intelligence as the standard for identifying artists. Her fiber sculptures invite comparisons with sculptures by major artists of the twentieth century and allude to a striking variety of forms, from the works of Alberto Giacometti to classical sculpture in its fragmentary state to children's toys (fig. 3). What makes the sculptures even more staggering as artworks is the fact that Scott has no conception of the associations sparked by her objects and no knowledge of the history of art. She has never visited a museum or read an art book, does not know she is an "artist," and never intends to make "art" when she sets to work, at least in conventional understanding. Scott, who has Down syndrome, was warehoused at age seven in the Ohio Asylum for the Education of Idiotic and Imbecilic Youth and spent the next thirty-five years of her life as a ward of the state, until her twin sister rescued her and enrolled her in the Creative Growth Center in California. Almost immediately, she began to make fiber sculptures six hours a day, and she has maintained this relentless pace for over ten years (fig. 4). One incident in particular illuminates her attitude toward her work. During a period of construction in the art center, Scott was left unobserved for longer than usual. She emptied every paper-towel dispenser in the building and fabricated a beautiful monochromatic sculpture made entirely of knotted white paper towels (fig. 5).



FIG. 4
Judith Scott in action. Photograph by Leon A. Borensztein. Reproduced by permission of the Creative Growth Center.

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Fig. 5
Judith Scott, untitled, no date. Photograph by Leon A. Borensztein. Reproduced by permission of the Creative Growth Center.

We assume that art is an expression of genius and autonomy, just as we assume that aesthetic technique is a form of brilliance always at the artist's disposal. Intelligence, however, is fraught with difficulties as a measure of aesthetic quality, and intention in particular has long been condemned as an obsolete tool for interpreting works of art.[1] Disability aesthetics does not embrace genius, bodily integrity, and health as standards of beauty. Nor does it support the aversion to disability required by traditional conceptions of human perfection. Rather, it broadens the inclusion of disability found throughout modern art by affirming that disability may operate both as a critical framework for questioning aesthetic presuppositions in the history of art and as a value in its own right important to future conceptions of what art is.

Notes

This article will be published in an expanded version in *Stumbling Blocks: Disability-Visuality* (2006), a themed issue of the *Journal of Visual Culture*, edited by Lennard J. Davis and Marquard Smith.

[1] The pathbreaking rejection of intention as a standard of interpretation is Wimsatt and Beardsley. For additional discussion of the role of intention in disability aesthetics, see Siebers 241–42.

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https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167860 Published online by Cambridge University Press