

Afterward: Celebration, Eulogy, or Pride in Disability Scholarship and Community?
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At the commencement of the Unruly Salon Series, Dr. Catherine Frazee asked us to remember that the “Unruly Salon ordains and inducts each of us to pay attention, to make connections, to respond – in short to *contribute* to the opening and unfolding of this cultural space” [sic]. Specifically, Dr. Frazee called on us to do the “work of excavation, weaving and coming to pride.”

With these frameworks in mind, I will consider the impact and possible futures (or not) for the Unruly Salon from my perspective as a disabled student.

Excavation of Disability History in One University’s Context

Like other universities in North America, The University of British Columbia (UBC) has not always been a warm or even tepid environment for disabled students. History tells us that it took several court battles, lost by UBC in fantastic ways, before the university realized that it not only *had* to support and accommodate students with disabilities, but that it *should*.

In my own experience as a visually impaired student at the University of British Columbia, meeting other students with disabilities over the last six years has been incidental, accidental, and random. Not being able to see meant that I didn’t meet many other blind people unless I literally ran into them. Most of the blind and other disabled people I do know on campus were previous friends and contacts from organizations outside the university (e.g., the Canadian National Institute for the Blind).

As is the case I imagine at many universities, my university does indeed provide services and accommodations to students with disabilities, support, as it were, to individuals, but it does not overextend itself at all to support communities, advocate or truly promote active engagement or participation of disabled people on all levels. UBC does not provide the infrastructure or environment necessary to encourage the interaction and networking of students with disabilities aside from the odd, start of the year mixer. My fellow disabled students have been cast as passive receivers of services, not active agents of change. There is no *US* in UBC.

The emergence of the Salon this term and the resultant arrival of artists, academics, community members, politicians, and radicals has created, for the first time, a refreshing sense of a real disability community at UBC.

During the three months of the Salon Series, I have felt like an active agent of dialogue, inquiry, and engagement with a large, unruly and dynamic community that has not often come together on campus in such a powerful and all-inclusive manner.

Weaving

While I did not find much of a disabled community at UBC when I first arrived, I did encounter and fell head first into and head over heels for the queer community here (or LGBT if you prefer). The time I spent engaged with these groups connected me with students, staff and faculty – and a number of other UBC and Vancouver community members – who were just as unruly as the members of these Salons, and they have had a lasting impact on me, fellow students and the campus.

The importance of weaving with the lessons from the Queer community is the recognition that spaces for creative community engagement are hard won and must be continually nurtured. We need consistent student engagement and an interdisciplinary scholarly program such as Disability Studies, not merely Disability Services, to sustain and grow our citizenship, belonging and intellectual involvement in the University.

Queers worked many long hours to establish permanent (and well-funded!) student groups as well as to foster academic legitimacy, both of which are necessary for community building and for social change at the university level.

Of course, the Faculty Association Ad Hoc Committee on Gay and Lesbian Studies was finally neutered of its “Gay and Lesbian” affiliation by reducing the department title to “Critical Studies in Sexuality,” or “CSIS,” so I shudder to think what may be created in the attempt to establish Disability Studies at UBC. Perhaps we’ll end up with “Critical Investigations in Ability” or “CIA.” We may be inviting too much scrutiny.

All joking aside, however, a Disability Studies department is what we need at UBC. Student groups alone have not remained. “Student Services” supports individuals, not communities. We need an enduring space on campus in which to share, question and learn together and to challenge the current social hegemonies that disallow our active participation and involvement in laying claim to who we are and how we are represented.

Coming to Pride

Speaking of queers, something else we share with this group is the “coming to pride” that Dr. Frazee outlined to us so few months ago. “[C]oming to pride,” she explained to us. “Is a delicate alchemy that can only take root in the fertile ground of community. It is our connection to each other that transforms stigma to grace, personal burden to collective struggle, shame to honour.” I believe in these Salons we have come to pride, but how will we continue to do so without an established and flourishing community that goes beyond passive receivers of service?

So what have the Salons achieved? They have reminded me of the power of community, and in that community, the Salons have created an opportunity for active and creative engagement with ideas and people. They have reminded me of my own power and creativity, and that I am indeed part of something greater than my own personal struggles, achievements, and failings in the dark.

And in that revelation of finding me implicated in a greater community, I am reminded of the responsibilities of students to ask questions and challenge! Radical bodies do not negotiate

bureaucratic spaces well, literally or symbolically, and it seems strange to operate on the limited level of bureaucratic administration and not as an engaged community or at least a critical and unruly receiver. We require spaces like the Salons to thrive and to create community on all levels: academically, personally, creatively, and socially. The magic created by events such as the Salons affords us a glimpse of the possible. Unfortunately, if the Salons are temporary, then, my remarks become a eulogy as they as much as they are an acknowledgement and a celebration. The creation of a permanent community requires considerable time, effort, and institutional support – and the support and active involvement of disabled students, as well as faculty and staff.

In this last Salon of the Series, Mr. Stephen Honisch drew our attention through music to the “fragile spaces between impairment and disability”, and I would argue that these very Salons themselves are “fragile spaces” - ones we should cherish for their suspension of labels and constraints and their rampant ambiguity, and recognizing their value and infrequent occurrences, work to produce more of them

The Salons remind us to take pride in the achievements of the past and the work of the Series today, and to make a commitment to the ongoing work that lies ahead.

References

Honisch, S. (2008, March). *The road to marginalization is paved with good intentions: In pursuit of the rehumanization of physically impaired musicians*. Paper presented at the Unruly Salon Series at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver: Canada.

Biographical Statements for Contributors to the Unruly Salon Series Highlighted in This Issue of
the Review of Disability Studies

David Anderson graduated with a BA (major in English Literature, minor in Critical Studies in Sexuality) at the University of British Columbia. He also holds a Certificate in Intercultural Communication. Currently, he is a program coordinator at the University of British Columbia's Continuing Studies, Centre for Intercultural Communication. David's scholarly interests concern the interplay between sexuality and disability, especially the preoccupation of North American gay male culture with the visual in contrast with visual impairment and blindness. He is a passionate supporter of activism and activist scholarship and is an ardent facilitator and educator. David has been visually impaired his whole life.

Sheena Brown is a recent MA graduate from the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. Her graduate work explored meanings post secondary students, who had previously been identified as special educational students made of disability, normalcy and education. She is currently interested in the links between disability and constructions of "productive citizenship."

Catherine Frazee is a writer, an educator, and an activist. These three identities come together for her at Ryerson University in Toronto, where she happily indulges activist inclinations and curiosities about disability rights, disability culture, and disability resistance. As Professor of Distinction in Ryerson Disability Studies program and Co-director of its Institute for Disability Studies Research and Education, her writing and teaching draw from a lifetime of experience as a disabled person and many years of leadership in the equality struggles of marginalized groups in Canada.

Christopher A. Lee spent two years in Toronto working with Judith Snow as one of her personal assistants. He is currently pursuing a Masters degree within the Educational Studies Department at the University of British Columbia, with a focus on disability studies. He also works as a program manager at a non-profit social service agency in Vancouver that supports people who are labeled disabled living in the community.

Lynn Manning is an award winning poet, playwright, actor, and former world champion of blind judo. In 1996, the Los Angeles-based artist co-founded Watts Village Theater Company. He is currently president of The FireHouse Theater Company. Lynn's autobiographical solo play, *Weights*, most recently received a Fringe Review Theatre Award for "Excellence In Theatre" at the 2008 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Since its premier in 2000, Lynn has performed *Weights* from Chicago to Off Broadway and from Croatia to the United Kingdom. Lynn's very first play, *Shoot*, is included in the groundbreaking collection, *Beyond Victims and Villains* (contemporary plays by disabled playwrights).

Victoria Maxwell is an actress, playwright, performer, and is *Crazy for Life*. *Crazy For Life* is a tour-de-force one-woman show of Victoria Maxwell's roller coaster ride with bipolar disorder. A brave, funny, and compelling look at experiencing, surviving, and coming to terms with mental illness, actress, motivational speaker, writer, and educator Victoria Maxwell takes us around the bend, and back again: from meditation groups to hospital psych wards, from black depressions to

manic highs, and psychedelic psychoses. Her most memorable moment is joyfully running down the street... naked... in posh Point Grey, playing hide-n'-seek with the Divine. In Toronto, she performed to sold out audiences and rave reviews. Last September, she "hit the boards" in England and continues to tour throughout North America and Europe, being translated into both Japanese and Spanish. An award-winning actress and playwright with over 15 years experience, Victoria has worked alongside David Duchovny, John Travolta, and Johnny Depp, among others, and appears on stages and in films across North America.

Geoff McMurphy is a dancer, choreographer, and sculptor. He is also the Artistic Director of the Society for Disability Arts and Culture (S4DAC) in British Columbia and one of the five artists featured in the Bonnie Sherr Klein film "Shameless: The Art of Disability." S4DAC was the first to take up the challenge of creating a "disability arts movement" in Canada, a movement that has gained strength and respect around the globe. The Society's signature event, the kickstART Festival of Disability Arts and Culture in Vancouver (2001, 2004), was Canada's first international festival of disability arts.

Leslie G. Roman is a painter, poet and Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. She publishes widely in and bridges disability studies, cultural studies, and anti-colonial feminism. She co-created with Geoff McMurphy the groundbreaking Unruly Salon Series and is currently completing a SSHRC-funded project that explores the interconnections among asylum-making, residential schools for people with disabilities and medicalized colonialism in the case of the Woodlands School in British Columbia, entitled: 'The Burden of Imperfection: Querying British Columbia's Participation in the *Eugenic Atlantic*;', (1878-1996). Her work appears in *Educational Theory*, *Discourse: The Cultural Politics of Education*, *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, among others. She co-edited *Dangerous Territories: Struggles for Difference and Equality* (Routledge), *Views Beyond the 'Border Country': Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics* (Routledge) and the award-winning, *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture*, (The Falmer Press). Her book, *Contested Knowledge* will appear shortly (Rowman & Littlefield) and takes up questions about unruly body/mind politics.

Judith Snow is an inspirational speaker, writer, collaborator, artist, and organizer. She is a leading advocate on social policy, particularly as it affects people labeled "disabled." Her accomplishments include developing Canada's first service to support students with disabilities in post-secondary education. She is credited with inventing the support circle model of building relationship-based assistance for people with intellectual disabilities, and with piloting individualized funding for personal assistance – a model of support that makes full participation in life available for people with extensive physical and intellectual challenges. Her books include: *The Inclusion Papers* and *What's Really Worth Doing and How to Do It*.

Stephen J. Toope is Professor and the 12th President and Vice Chancellor of The University of British Columbia. His five-year term began in July 2006. An International Law scholar, who represented Western Europe and North America on the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances from 2002-2007, Professor Toope's academic interests include public international law, legal theory, human rights, international dispute resolution, and family law. Professor Toope is currently Vice-Chair, World University Services Canada, Director of

the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Member of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and member of the Research Council of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.

Tania Willard, of Red Willow Designs, is an artist, woodcutter, and designer from the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation in the Interior of British Columbia. She works with narrative and story in the arts, media, and advocacy to share First Nations' history and experiences in the struggle for social justice. Tania Willard recently collaborated with the Gallery Gachet to produce the hard-hitting and powerful exhibit entitled, "Crazymaking." "Crazymaking" depicts the historical traumas that frame mental health issues for First Nations people, particularly those that are hidden or erased such as stories about "Indian Insane Asylums, Mohawk Saints and Native Veterans." The artwork of Tania Willard featured here interconnects with the disability studies research that will appear in *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* Jan.- Feb., 2009), 21-22.. This invited issue claims space for other key works from the Unruly Salon Series.